

The Hindu, 1 October 2004

Indian journalists to visit PoK

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 30. After allowing Pakistani journalists access to Jammu and Kashmir, Indian journalists from Jammu and Srinagar and other persons interested in Kashmir affairs will visit Muzaffarabad and Gilgit in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Islamabad and Lahore from November 19 to 26. A group of 18 journalists from Pakistan, including some from Muzaffarabad, are to visit Jammu and Kashmir from October 3 to 10 under the aegis of the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA). "This exchange, the first of its type in 57 years, is intended to provide an opportunity to mediapersons to assess [for] themselves the situation on the two sides and thus perform their job objectively," a SAFMA statement said today. "It will permit journalists from the two sides to make an on-the-spot assessment of the situation," K.K. Katyal, president of SAFMA's India chapter, said today. Welcoming the joint statement issued by India and Pakistan on September 24 in New York, Imtiaz Alam, SAFMA secretary-general, said he hoped this cross-Kashmir exchange between journalists would help them understand the Kashmir situation better. SAFMA is also organising a conference on resolution of inter-state conflicts in South Asia on October 9 and 10 in New Delhi at which the visiting Pakistani journalists will be present. A meeting on the reconciliation processes in South Asia will be organised in Lahore on November 20 and 21.

The Times of India, 1 October 2004

IAF's base in Tajikistan will be ready by '04 (Mahendra Ved)

NEW DELHI: India's first-ever military outpost on foreign soil, located at Farkhor, about 10 km outside Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, is ready to become operational by this year-end, without any fanfare. Reliable sources in the government say the Indian Air Force (IAF) is pressing for an early decision on a suitable aircraft to be stationed at this military base. Operational requirements stipulate at least two squadrons to be stationed there. Foreign analysts have noted that the acquisition of the military base in Tajikistan would certainly give the Indian armed forces a longer strategic reach. The Army is also into this exercise, having operated a military hospital there, basically to nurse the Northern Alliance soldiers who fought the Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan between 1997 and 2001. The base is the outcome of considerable behind-the-scenes work by the MEA, clinched after the US, which marked a big military presence in Central Asia in the wake of 9/11, preferred not to establish a base. Work by then defence minister George Fernandes led to a bilateral agreement being signed in 2002 during then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Tajikistan. Although Russia's 82nd Motorised Division guards the Tajik border with Afghanistan, the bilateral agreement stipulates the presence of both Indian Army and IAF personnel who will also assist in warding off any threat to Tajikistan.

The Hindu, 2 October 2004

Reschedule summit, India tells E.U. (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, OCT. 1. India has asked for a rescheduling of its October 14 summit with the European Union. The Prime Minister of Netherlands (where the meeting is to take place), Jan Peter Balkenende, is not keeping good health. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, was scheduled to travel to The Hague. The fifth summit now stands effectively postponed after the Indian request. The Netherlands holds the rotating E.U. Presidency. Mr. Balkenende has also pulled out of the October 8-9 Asia-Europe Summit (ASEM) in Hanoi. At the fourth summit held in New Delhi on November 29, 2003 the Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, was unable to attend due to illness. Despite protocol issues, India went ahead with the summit — despite the fact that the Italian Minister of State, Margerita Boniver, represented the European Presidency. European Commission officials and the Dutch Presidency have been actively preparing for The Hague summit. A "strategic partnership" between India and the European Union is to be launched there. A "cultural declaration" is also on the cards. However, there could be a silver lining in the postponement of the summit as far as both India and the European Union are concerned. The current European Commission President, Romano Prodi and the External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, who are to attend the summit, finish their tenure by the end of October. From November 1, a new team takes over at the European Commission in Brussels. While Jose Manuel Barroso from Portugal replaces Mr. Prodi, Benita Ferrero-Waldner of Austria takes over from Mr. Patten. India and the E.U. have been actively engaged in adding value to their summits. The European Commission has submitted a strategy paper on India to New Delhi, which, too, has prepared a response to the document.

The Hindu, 2 October 2004

Indian Army celebrates Chinese National Day (Sushanta Talukdar)

BUMLA (CHINA), OCT. 1. As the Chinese national flag went up in Beijing to mark the 55th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, Indian Army officials, their family members and soldiers joined their Chinese counterparts to celebrate the day at an altitude of 15,500 feet along the Sino-Indian border, about 4,500 km from the Chinese capital, here today. This was the first time that the Indian media had been invited by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to cover the joint celebration of the Chinese National Day on the Chinese side of the border. The 50-member Indian delegation led by Brigadier Vikram Raghavan that crossed over to the Chinese side at 9:30 a.m. was given a warm welcome by the PLA officials at the Heap of Stones in Bumla sector that lies on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). At 9:35 a.m. the flag was hoisted by the Senior Colonel, Chan Yanhui of the PLA, with Indian Army officials. An Indian flag kept unfurled near the Chinese flag was also fluttering in the chilly wind as the mercury dipped down to minus two degree Celsius. The Indian delegation enjoyed every moment of the two-hour long celebration that included an hour-long cultural programme of songs in Chinese and English and dances presented by the Chinese Army personnel and civilian performers. A makeshift tent and a dais had been erected at the site and PLA officials took care to make the occasion pleasant and cordial. The celebration site falls in Tsonadzong province of China and about 8 km from the nearest PLA post at Nagdoh. The Indian delegation had marched to the Chinese side from Bumlahut near the Heap of Stones on the Indian side of the border about 37km off Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh.

The Hindu, 2 October 2004

'Manmohan did discuss terrorism with Musharraf' (Hasan Suroor)

LONDON, OCT. 1. India has made it clear to Pakistan that cross-border terrorism must end if it wants the peace process to continue, the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, said here. Dismissing the BJP's claim that the issue of terrorism was not taken up by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, with the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, in New York, Mr. Singh said the fact that the "January 6 statement" was mentioned at the meeting meant that terrorism was discussed. "We told Pakistan if you really want the dialogue to go on, terrorism has to stop," Mr. Singh told members of the London-based Indian Journalists' Association. "The fact is that in both areas we have done a great deal of work," he said pointing out that as many as eight meetings had been held with Pakistan "in all areas and at all levels." India had proposed a comprehensive package of confidence-building measures, and efforts to carry the dialogue forward would continue.

The Telegraph, 2 October 2004

India, Lanka to narrow trade gap

Chennai, Oct. 1: India and Sri Lanka "are on the threshold" of a "comprehensive economic partnership agreement" (CEPA), a meeting of the countries' joint business council was told today. The partnership agreement under negotiation will address the "shortcomings" in the "free trade agreement (FTA)" between the two countries that is into its fourth year now, said Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, the Lankan minister for trade, commerce and consumer affairs. He was speaking at the India-Sri Lanka Joint Business Council's inaugural session here today. The new pact that would "broaden and deepen" the FTA's scope and content will not only involve trade in goods, but also liberalisation of trade in services and investment cooperation, and an "effective mechanism for trade facilitation", Fernandopulle said. He urged a "frank and honest assessment" of the FTA's impact because "we cannot be complacent with the ongoing trend in our economic relations by simply looking at statistics". "We are now approaching the stage of the CEPA, (so) it is very important that we work very closely with each other to resolve the current impediments," Fernandopulle added. Among the "impediments", he cited problems relating to "rules of origin" of goods so that a third country did not take advantage of the FTA in the two-way trade between India and Lanka. Later, in an informal chat with reporters, Fernandopulle dubbed the 20 per cent "sales tax" imposed by the Tamil Nadu government on Lankan imports as the "biggest non-tariff barrier we are facing". Describing the time as ripe for consolidation of bilateral trade, Union minister of state for commerce and industry E.V.K.S. Elangovan said the Centre had been apprised of certain "non-tariff barriers" that had come in the way of the FTA. "Soon, things will be put on the right path," he assured the Lankan minister and promised to write to the Jayalalithaa government on the issue. India's high commissioner in Colombo Nirupama Rao said India was now the third largest investor in Lanka, significantly as a result of the FTA.

The Telegraph, 2 October 2004

Pact to trap criminals

New Delhi, Oct. 1: Bangladesh and India, likely to decide on modalities for co-ordinated patrolling along the 4,000-km border, have finalised a deal to work together to cut the possible lines of escape for criminals across the border. The BSF had expected to reach an agreement on the final draft of the modalities at the meeting of the heads of the BSF and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) that ended here today. However, it is now expected to take some time. BDR chief, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, said he would respond to the BSF's suggestions shortly. Neither Chowdhury nor BSF chief Ajai Raj Sharma spelt out a time frame for the co-ordinated patrolling but some officials associated with the discussions said they were hopeful that it would be in place by February. Members of the Indian delegation, however, are suggesting that when an agreement was reached on sharing information about miscreants, Dhaka had opposed the use of the words insurgents and terrorists, and settled for criminals. The BSF had proposed the pact in view of Northeast insurgents crossing over to Bangladesh. Under the agreement, Sharma said, the security forces would inform their counterpart when a "serious crime" is committed and steps would be taken to seal all escape routes. Security officials said Delhi does not expect the BDR to act on all its requests but believes the pact would put it under pressure to keep a distance from militants. The two sides did not get into the nitty-gritty of the standoff on allowing India to erect a fence within 150 yards of the zero line as Dhaka had sought time to take a decision. But the home ministry has threatened to continue with the fencing. Chowdhury indicated that the BDR might not remain silent if Delhi carries out its threat. "The situation will dictate the response," he said.

The Hindu, 3 October 2004

Pakistan's 'political baggage' an impediment to free trade: Chidambaram (Sridhar Krishnaswami)

WASHINGTON, OCT. 2. If Pakistan continues to dabble with the "political baggage" on Kashmir, the issue of free trade within the South Asian region will not see any forward movement, the Union Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, has said. Addressing a World Bank seminar here on Friday, Mr. Chidambaram said that if Pakistan persisted in that direction, India would continue with its bilateral free trade arrangements with such neighbours that were willing to join — as had already taken place — for mutual benefit. Mr. Chidambaram was responding to remarks at the seminar by officials and non-officials of Pakistan that somehow free trade would have to proceed in tandem with the settlement of political issues between India and Pakistan. At a different level, he said that it was the "lack of political will" that was the major impediment to free trade talks in South Asia. Mr. Chidambaram said he was not somehow impressed with this "lack of political will" assessment pointing out that this was an indirect way of saying that either countries could not move on or there was an unwillingness on their parts to move on. Further, if there was the political will in 1985 how could that mean an absence of the same in 2004, he asked. He said he was prepared to move forward but if much of what was envisaged in 1985 remained on paper that was on account of the "political baggage" we had carried for the last 40 or 45 years. "I don't see it getting started at all."

The Hindu, 3 October 2004

'Scientific partnership with Russia will benefit India' (Vladimir Radyuhin)

MOSCOW, OCT. 2. Russia is India's most important scientific partner and is helping it become a powerful nation, according to

the Indian Ambassador to Russia, Kanwal Sibal. Speaking at the opening of the 12th session of the Joint Council of Indo-Russian Integrated Long-Term Programme in science and technology (ILTP) here today, Mr. Sibal described cooperation with Moscow in science and technology as the "key factor in strategic partnership" between the two countries. A high-power Indian delegation led by C.N.R. Rao, co-chairman of the ILTP Joint Council, and comprising seven secretaries from the Ministry of Science and Technology, has arrived here for the meet. The Russian delegation is led by Gury Marchuk, Russian co-chairman of the Joint Council. ILTP is the biggest and by far the most successful science and technology programme between any two nations. Since the inception of ILTP in 1987, India and Russia have jointly brought to fruition about 500 scientific projects and are now working on another 140 projects. Speaking about them, Prof. Rao drew attention to the Indo-Russian Centre Gas Hydrate Studies set up in Chennai earlier this year. "If we succeed in extracting gas hydrates from the seabed it will provide a complete solution to the energy problems of India, Russia and many other countries," he told The Hindu. India hopes to benefit from advanced research in Russia into gas hydrates as a new rich source of energy. "Russia is a great scientific nation and India will benefit greatly from collaboration with Russia in science and technology," he said.

The Telegraph, 3 October 2004

China sends peace envoy (Pranay Sharma)

New Delhi, Oct. 2: A visit to India by China's Prime Minister Wen Jia Bao seems unlikely this year, but Beijing has decided to send a senior emissary to keep the pace of engagement with Delhi going. Tang Jia Xuan's visit to Delhi, not yet announced formally, is likely to take place from October 20. He is a state councillor of the rank of vice-premier to whom, in the Beijing pecking order, foreign minister Li Zhao Xing reports on important foreign policy issues. Tang is expected to meet senior Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, foreign minister K. Natwar Singh and national security advisor J. Dixit. He may also meet Sonia Gandhi, the Congress chief and ruling alliance chairperson. One reason why the prime ministerial visit seems unlikely is the lack of "substantial agreements" that the two sides could sign if Wen were to come. Though not expressed in so many words, one of the pacts China would like to have on the table, ready to seal, is that on resolving the boundary dispute. Both sides have agreed that the "decades-old" dispute should not drag on to the next generation. There is consensus in Delhi and Beijing that an early resolution would benefit both and significantly contribute to strengthening ties. Since the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance came to power in May, the two sides have had one meeting between "special representatives" Dai Bing Guo and Dixit. Before that, Dai had had two rounds of discussions with Dixit's predecessor, Brajesh Mishra, when the National Democratic Alliance was in power.

The Tribune, 4 October 2004

G-24 nations demand greater voice in WB (PTI)

Washington, October 3. The Group of 24, representing developing countries, including India, has demanded revision of quotas or shareholding to give them a "greater voice" in these institutions by basing it on purchasing power parity and not international currency value. In a five-page communique issued yesterday, the G-24 countries demanded revision of quotas or shareholding by basing it on purchasing power parity and not on the basis of international currency value, which understates the global importance of developing countries. They also urged that the next World Bank President be chosen by a "transparent" selection process with a view to attracting the best candidates "regardless of nationality." Finance Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Senator Conrad Enill, was in the Chair and members included India's Finance Minister P Chidambaram. The communique said the IMF should undertake a more pro-active role to enhance the effectiveness of major economies in order to address global imbalances and sustain high growth momentum. Multi-lateral institutions and the rest of the international community must provide prompt and substantial concessional assistance to the hurricane-hit Caribbean region. The IMF and the World Bank should also intensify their assistance to the Palestinian people, it said. The Doha Round of world trade talks should result promptly in improved market access for developing country exports, dismantling of tariff escalation schemes and elimination of tariff peaks and non-tariff barriers, the communique said.

The Hindu, 4 October 2004

Pakistani journalist team in Kashmir

WAGAH (AMRITSAR), OCT. 3. A 15-member delegation of Pakistani journalists today crossed over to India on its way to perhaps the first-ever visit to Jammu and Kashmir by a team of scribes from that country. "This is for the first time after a gap of 57 years that the Government of India has agreed to the visit of Pakistani journalists to Jammu and Kashmir," the leader of the Pakistani delegation and Secretary General, South Asia Free Media Association, Imtiaz Alam, said soon after crossing the Radcliff Line at Wagah. "We do have plans to visit Srinagar, Kashmir, Anantnag and all troubled areas of the valley and in this regard the Indian Government has already granted permission to us to move in the valley and interact with the locals to have a first-hand experience of their plight," he said. The time has come for the journalists of both the nations to come out of the grip of "nationalistic" ideology, as they should "practically see what is happening across the LoC instead of biased reporting." Expressing his gratitude to the Indian Government, Mr. Alam said: "Today we are heading for Jammu where we are supposed to meet the various Muslims and non-Muslim organisations besides having an interactive session with the Jammu-based journalists." "During our stay in the valley we will also interact with the Kashmiri Pandits to know about their lifestyle and problems faced by them," Mr. Alam said. "Our programme also includes meeting political party leaders besides an interaction with the Hurriyat Conference."

The Hindu, 4 October 2004

Roh visit aimed at long-term cooperation (P.S.Suryanarayana)

SINGAPORE, OCT. 3 The first-ever "State visit" to India by the South Korean President, Roh Moo-Hyun, from Monday, is being undertaken to "set the foundation for a long-term cooperative partnership" between the two countries. A key official in Seoul, S.J. Yoon, told The Hindu over phone that while economic issues were likely to dominate the agenda of Mr. Roh's

meetings with the Indian leaders, regional security issues would also be discussed. The North Korean nuclear issue and other regional security questions were expected to be raised. Mr. Roh, only the second South Korean President to visit India, would be accompanied by the Foreign Minister, Ban Ki-Moon and the National Security Adviser, Kwon Jinho. Mr. Yoon, a ranking official in the presidential office, said the talks on the promotion of economic ties would be "very important," given India's emergence as an economic power. He cited India's information technology skills as a matter of prime interest to South Korea. The scope for IT-related "technical cooperation" is likely to be explored so that the two countries "can have a win-win situation." Looking beyond the "very high IT industry in India," South Korea is hoping "this visit will enhance the foundation" of overall political, trade and economic cooperation.

The Tribune, 4 October 2004

India, S. Korea to sign extradition treaty

New Delhi, October 3. India and South Korea will sign an extradition treaty and a treaty on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters during the three-day state visit here by South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun beginning tomorrow. Mr Roh will hold wide-ranging discussions with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the gamut of bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest. Mr Roh, who will be accompanied by a high-level official delegation including ministers of foreign affairs and trade, commerce, industry and energy, and information and communication, will meet President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and hold talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Vice-President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and External Affairs Minister K Natwar Singh.

The Hindu, 5 October 2004

India expected to help with Iraq elections: Hoon (Sandeep Dikshit)

NEW DELHI, OCT. 4. While making it clear that it was not pushing any agenda, Britain today said the international community expected India to assist Iraq in holding elections. "I would not be asking India for anything for these elections. But if asked, I will say, on behalf of the United Nations, that India should help with those elections in whatever form it chooses to give. Its assistance would be extremely welcome in view of its long and distinguished history," the British Defence Minister, Geoff Hoon, told a group of reporters here today. Mr. Hoon made it clear that the subject of sending Indian troops to Iraq would not come up during his interaction with his Indian counterpart, Pranab Mukherjee, whom he will be meeting for the first time. "I guarantee you I am not here to ask India to deploy troops in Iraq. With elections coming up, it is also not my responsibility to tell India in any way at all how it should or should not participate." But he conceded that the situation in Iraq would come up for discussions. "I am sure we will review the situation in Iraq. When I make such visits, my counterparts are interested in knowing how things are going in Iraq particularly for the British armed forces posted in the southern part of the country. The situation there is very different from in and around Baghdad, which perhaps inevitably gets into the newspaper headlines. But it doesn't give people the feeling of [the] progress that is being made. Not underestimating the security problems we have had, the situation, generally speaking, has been calmer," he observed.

The Hindu, 5 October 2004

'Work in progress to resolve Kashmir issue' (B.Muralidhar Reddy)

ISLAMABAD, OCT. 4. Pakistan has claimed that "work is in progress" in exploring options for resolution of the Kashmir issue to the satisfaction of India and Pakistan. The Foreign Office spokesman, Masood Khan, told the weekly news conference that in the wake of the recent meeting between the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, and the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, efforts were on to explore options on the issue. He was responding to a question on whether the Pakistan Foreign Office had begun identifying options after the New York meeting. He maintained that the agreement between Gen. Musharraf and Dr. Singh to explore options underlined the political will of the two Governments to resolve the lingering dispute. "The two leaders have crossed one barrier in New York when they talked about the possible options on Kashmir for a peaceful negotiated settlement," he said. The spokesman argued that in the past the two countries had been expressing their stated positions but now, for the first time, they have agreed to explore options.

The Telegraph, 5 October 2004

Britain sees India threat (Amit Roy)

London, Oct. 4: Gordon Brown, the chancellor of the exchequer and the most important man in the government after Tony Blair, appears to be on the warpath against India and China. At least, it appears that way to some senior Indian observers in London after the chancellor's comments in the US over the weekend were headlined in today's Times newspaper. Brown had made similar comments at last week's Labour Party conference in Brighton when he said Britain "can be the global success story of future years" but for that to happen, the country "must respond to the global economic challenge of countries like China and India". Is Brown, whose ambitions of taking over as Prime Minister have been frustrated by Blair's declared intention to serve a full third term if Labour is re-elected, pitching Britain against India? Some Indian observers say the Times story "definitely is negative". The report, headlined "Brown sounds warning on might of China and India", by its Washington correspondent begins: "Gordon Brown yesterday gave his strongest warning yet of the threat to Britain's prosperity posed by the rising economic might of China and India and urged businesses to do more to meet the growing strategic threat to their markets." It went on: "In his starkest comments yet on implications for the UK of the emergence of China and India as economic powerhouses, the chancellor highlighted their vast cost advantage over the UK industry and vowed to do more to bolster British companies as they fight to retain their grip on key global markets." The Times continued: "Addressing fellow world finance ministers at the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund in Washington, Mr Brown noted that the wage costs of Chinese and Indian companies were 'just 5 per cent of those in the UK'.

The Hindu, 6 October 2004

India, South Korea to study economic ties (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, Oct. 5. India and South Korea today agreed to establish a study group to review bilateral trade, investment and services and come up with measures to take economic engagement forward. The group will comprise officials, economists and businesspersons. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the visiting South Korean President, Roh Moo-Hyun, agreed today that the group would also examine the feasibility of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement between New Delhi and Seoul — it will start work by January 2005 and submit its report within a year. Both sides set a bilateral trade target of \$10 billion by 2008. After the talks, the External Affairs Ministry spokesman said India and South Korea also agreed to promote exchanges and interaction in the defence field, including cooperation between the two navies, coast guards and "related agencies" in areas such as anti-piracy and search and rescue operations. "Consultations on expanding cooperation in the fight against international terrorism would be carried out through various bilateral and multilateral mechanisms," he said, pointing out that a new dialogue on foreign policy and security had also been agreed upon by the two nations. A treaty on extradition and another on mutual legal assistance matters were signed by the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, and the South Korean Foreign Minister, Ban Ki-Moon, in the presence of the Prime Minister and the President. "The Prime Minister welcomed investment by Korean companies in India and said the Government of India was committed to creating a congenial climate for foreign direct investment. President Roh responded positively and remarked that Korean companies were prepared to make a long-term commitment to India and that they were in India to stay," the spokesman said about the discussions.

The Hindu, 6 October 2004

Schroeder arriving today

NEW DELHI, Oct. 5. The German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, will visit India from October 6-7, the External Affairs Ministry said in a press release on Monday. The visit is part of annual summit-level meetings agreed to between the two countries in October 2001. On October 6, Mr. Schroeder will address an Indo-German "economic forum" meeting, and inaugurate a "science circle" of scientists and research institutions from the two sides. On October 7, he will call on the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, hold delegation-level talks with the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. "

The Hindu, 6 October 2004

Manmohan, Wen may meet during ASEAN summit (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, Oct. 5. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and his Chinese counterpart, Wen Jiabao, are likely to meet on the sidelines of events linked to the 10th Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Vientiane, Laos on November 29-30. It will be the first meeting of the heads of government of the two countries since the Congress-led Government came to power in May. The Foreign Ministers, Natwar Singh, and Li Zhaoxing, have already met, as have Special Representatives, J.N. Dixit, and Dai Bingguo, to discuss the boundary issue from a political perspective. While Dr. Manmohan Singh is scheduled to go to Laos for the ASEAN-India summit meeting, Mr. Wen will attend the "ASEAN plus three" (ASEAN, China, Japan and South Korea) summit and the ASEAN-China meeting in Vientiane. Last year, the Indian and Chinese leaders met on the sidelines of the ninth ASEAN summit in Bali, Indonesia on October 8. South Block sources said preparations for the Manmohan-Wen meeting were on. New Delhi is getting ready to receive Tang Jiaxuan, a member of the State Council, the highest executive organ of the Chinese Government. He is expected by the month-end. A former Foreign Minister, Mr. Tang is among the five State Councillors. The State Councillor associated with foreign policy is placed above the Foreign Minister in hierarchy and comes below the Premier.

The Hindu, 7 October 2004

'India for a stable and peaceful Iraq' (Amit Baruah)

NEW DELHI, Oct. 6. The External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, today said that the priority in Iraq should be to "ensure an early return" to conditions of "security and normality" for the people. Speaking at the Jamia Millia Islamia, he said India's policy towards Iraq was based on principles and "our" national interest. "We want the Iraqi people to freely determine their political future and exercise control over their natural resources. It is our belief that the United Nations has a crucial role to play in the process of political and economic reconstruction of Iraq." New Delhi saw the U.N. endorsement of Iraq's interim Government as the first step towards transparent transfer of full sovereignty to the people. "A stable and peaceful Iraq is vital for the larger stability of the region, which is home for about 3.5 million Indians, the source of our energy requirements and an important destination for our goods and services," the text of his address said. Reiterating that India would not send troops to Iraq, Mr. Singh said the "question does not arise" in the light of the unanimous resolution passed by Parliament on April 8, 2003. "We are ready to respond to the needs of the Iraqi people for stability, security, political progress and economic reconstruction.

The Hindu, 7 October 2004

Russia to focus on terrorism in talks (Vladimir Radyuhin)

MOSCOW, Oct. 6. Terrorism will dominate the agenda of the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, during his interactions in Delhi later this week, a Russian spokesman said. "In Russia-India dialogue on international issues we specially stress the necessity to strengthen cooperation in the fight against international terrorism," the Foreign Ministry spokesman, Alexander Yakovenko, said in an interview. "India and Russia are ahead of other countries fighting this global evil and have always called international community to join efforts in this area." Mr. Lavrov will be in Delhi between October 8 and 10 to prepare the visit of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, to India in December. "The sides will discuss measures on strengthening international and bilateral cooperation in fighting terrorism and drug trafficking and also in creating a solid international legal basis to oppose religious extremism and separatism," Mr. Yakovenko said on Tuesday. Terrorism has been pushed to the top of Russia's foreign policy priorities by a recent spate of Chechen terror attacks that claimed hundreds of lives.

The Hindu, 7 October 2004

India, South Korea to work closely on U.N. reforms

NEW DELHI, Oct. 6. India and South Korea believe that it is crucial to make the United Nations Security Council more representative and effective even by expanding its membership. "They agreed to closely work together in this regard," a joint statement issued after the visit of the South Korean President, Roh Moo-Hyun, said today. "The two sides acknowledged the vital importance of the United Nations in promoting international peace, security and development. They agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation in international affairs and to promote their dialogue and consultations on U.N.-related issues, including on the reform of the U.N.," it said. Agreeing that the ASEAN Regional Forum was playing a positive role in confidence-building and security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, India and South Korea said they would cooperate closely with each other in activities such as exchanging views on the security situation and the future direction of the Forum. "Both sides also agreed that India and the RoK [Republic of Korea], dialogue partners of ASEAN [Association of South-East Asian Nations], will closely cooperate with it for the development of the region," the joint statement said, without going into specifics.

The Hindu, 7 October 2004

Investor confidence restored: Chidambaram (Sridhar Krishnaswami)

WASHINGTON, Oct. 6. The Union Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, has disputed the notion that American investors lack confidence in the Indian economy but said that while there may have been some concerns during the election cycle, confidence had been "more or less completely restored." Mr. Chidambaram was talking to the media at the Indian Embassy here, wrapping up his visit to Washington. He was asked to comment on American investor confidence against the backdrop of the present political arrangement in the country. "I don't get that impression," Mr. Chidambaram said when asked about lack of American investor confidence. "When you look at the FII fund flows, May and June were negative, but July was positive, August was more positive and September has been even more positive ... FDI flows have been quite impressive. In fact, in 2004, the FDI flows are among the highest in the last seven or eight years." Mr. Chidambaram said.

Indian Express, 7 October 2004

India weighing options to get Bangla moving (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

NEW DELHI, Oct 6: With attacks across Assam and Nagaland prompting demands that Bangladesh be told to dismantle camps of North East militants on its territory, New Delhi has begun looking at the options it has to mount greater pressure on Dhaka. Officials indicated that the Government may not stop Bangladesh Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan from travelling to India later this month because it offers an opportunity to send the message across. Khan's exact itinerary has not yet been finalised — he will be here to extend an invitation for the SAARC summit in Dhaka in January — with Bangladesh proposing three sets of dates for the trip. The presence of militants on Bangladeshi soil was also taken up at the recent meeting of BSF and BDR. Prior to that, Home Secretary Dharendra Singh had travelled to Dhaka. Bangladesh continues to stick to its position that it has been unable to trace militant camps. There is, however, a view that India must utilise its diplomatic leverage to get Bangladesh to act against the 194 militant camps. In this context, deferring the decision to extend a Rs 100-crore credit line for railway projects in Bangladesh is under consideration.

The Hindu, 8 October 2004

Circumstances not ripe for signing NPT: Manmohan (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, Oct. 7. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said today that the circumstances were "not ripe" for India to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) "right now". Dr. Singh, however, said that India was voluntarily fulfilling the commitments that went along with being a responsible nuclear power acting with "due restraint". Answering a question at a joint press interaction with the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, Dr. Singh said: "We are a nuclear power, but we are a responsible nuclear power. We act with restraint. We have a no-first use doctrine in place. "Also, we have an impeccable record of export controls so that any unauthorised use of sensitive nuclear materials can be effectively prevented." The Prime Minister was responding to a question on whether India might sign the NPT "one day". India has consistently taken the position that the NPT is unequal and discriminatory and that it will not sign the treaty. The pressure on New Delhi to sign it mounted after the May 1998 nuclear tests, but there has been no change in India's position on the issue. The Prime Minister made it clear that India was interested in working with like-minded countries in strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation system. "We are ourselves victims of the gaps that exist in the present non-proliferation arrangements."

The Hindu, 8 October 2004

E.U. ready for greater role in global affairs: Schroeder (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, Oct. 7. The European Union was ready to assume greater international responsibility commensurate with its size, economic clout and standing in the world, the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, said today. Delivering the Seventh Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture, Mr. Schroeder said the E.U. needed partners to do this job and had recently presented some proposals to India to deepen and develop the E.U.-India partnership. He was delighted at India's positive response to these proposals. At the beginning of the 21st Century, the world had not become any safer; many of the hopes that blossomed with the end of the Cold War had not been fulfilled. "We have certainly seen a drastic reduction in the number of inter-State wars. But international terrorism, internal conflicts, failing States and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction threaten the security of us all," he remarked. While he did not refer to the recent invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies, the Chancellor said global problems required global responses. "Today, not a single country in the world can successfully tackle these problems on its own. To do so we need a strong and effective multilateral system one that is founded on the force of law and not on the law of force." Strengthening multilateralism required more than a reform of the United Nations' Security Council.

Indian Express, 8 October 2004

India, Pakistan talks on CBMs next month

New Delhi, Oct 7: The next round of meetings to discuss confidence building measures (CBMs) between India and Pakistan will be held in the later part of November and early December. It's learnt that this is also around the time when Pakistan PM Shaukat Aziz may visit India as the SAARC chairperson, but the dates are yet to be finalised. The next round will include expert-level meetings on nuclear CBMs which would discuss the draft agreement on advance notification of missile tests. A similar meeting will also take place separately to discuss conventional CBMs. Another meeting is slated to discuss issues linked with the commencement of the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service with the two sides differing over the travel documents required by bus passengers. While suggestions for specific dates have been exchanged, both sides are yet to finalise the schedule except for a meeting between the BSF and Pakistan Rangers which will be held at Chandigarh on October 11-14. The Coast Guard and the Pakistan maritime security agency are also slated to meet to discuss the MoU for establishing a communication link between them. The Sir Creek issue will also be addressed during this period with a joint survey of the boundary pillars in the horizontal segment of the international boundary. This apart, narcotics control authorities from both sides will meet and are expected to finalise a memorandum of understanding. A meeting of the committee on experts on trade has also been slotted.

Indian Express, 8 October 2004

Russian Foreign Minister begins India visit today (Dadan Upadhyay)

Moscow, Oct 7: President Vladimir Putin's coming summit with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi, will be high on the agenda for talks between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Indian counterpart. Lavrov will arrive in New Delhi tomorrow on a three-day visit. Besides Singh, he will meet External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee and other senior officials. Before Lavrov's departure to New Delhi, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Alexyev told mediapersons today that Lavrov's visit would be devoted to preparations for the Indo-Russian summit. "We hope that the new summit in Delhi will be a big event in our relations and will help to solve problems in the trade and economic sphere and confirm our mutual understanding and partnership in world politics," Alexyev said. He added that during negotiations with his Indian counterpart, Lavrov is expected to give final touches to the work on a number of documents, including a communique and a declaration to be signed by the two sides. Earlier, Russian Foreign Ministry official spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said that while discussing international issues, including Indo-Pak relations, Afghanistan, West Asia and Iraq, India and Russia will "specially focus on the necessity to strengthen cooperation in the fight against international terrorism".

The Hindu, 9 October 2004

Lavrov, Natwar Singh discuss fight against terrorism

New Delhi, Oct. 8. The joint fight against international terrorism figured prominently in the discussions between the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, and the visiting Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, today. Mr. Lavrov also called on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. After the meeting, Mr. Singh said that Russia had moved a resolution in the United Nations Security Council that took ahead the fight against terrorism. The Russian action comes in the backdrop of the terrorist attack on a school in Beslan by Chechen terrorists. Mr. Singh said the resolution (which officials said, separately, was likely to be passed by the Security Council tonight) would empower the Council to take immediate steps against terrorists. Earlier, during a joint press interaction with Mr. Lavrov at Hyderabad House, Mr. Singh said they discussed different dimensions of terrorism in Russia and in India. Mr. Singh and Mr. Lavrov told presspersons that their meeting was in preparation for the arrival of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. Mr. Putin will be visiting New Delhi for the annual India-Russia summit in the first week of December. Mr. Lavrov said he had also discussed the possibility of new investment projects with Mr. Singh. Asked if Russia would support the Indian membership of the G-8, he said that the issue did not come up in the discussions.

The Tribune, 9 October 2004

DSGMC to move European Court on turban issue (R.Suryamurthy)

New Delhi, Oct. 8. The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) has decided to move the European Court of Human Rights against the French law banning the wearing of turban by Sikhs in government institutions. Counsel for the DSGMC, Mr KTS Tuls, told The Tribune that the petition would be filed on October 11 challenging the Law of Secularism enacted by the French Government, which prohibits Sikhs and members of other religious groups from wearing articles of faith, religion and ethnic identity in public schools and regulate their wearing at the workplaces. Mr Tuls, a former Additional Solicitor-General of India, said the turban was an integral part of Sikh religion and the Secularism Law violated the UN and European conventions, to which France was a signatory. The Secularism Law came into effect from September 2, 2004. The petition said the law denied the right to Sikh children to attend government schools while practising their religion. The petition sought to secure recognition of right of Sikh children of wearing turban while attending government schools in France. It sought a direction to the French Government to act in accordance with the international conventions and treaties to which it was a party.

The Hindu, 10 October 2004

Neighbourhood of peace and stability, a high priority: Manmohan

New Delhi, Oct. 9. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said today that his Government would like to encourage the free flow of ideas and people to help shed prejudices and develop an appreciation of the existing ground realities in South Asia. In a message to the annual convention of the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA), Dr. Singh said that creating a neighbourhood of "peace and stability" was a high priority for the Congress-led Government. "In this effort, the media can play a substantial and critical role by shaping ideas that can overcome the burden of past perceptions." Referring to the

liberalisation of visa rules for journalists from Pakistan wanting to visit India, he said he was glad that this had yielded concrete results. "I am pleased that this conference is taking place just a few days after a visit to the State of Jammu and Kashmir by a group of journalists from Pakistan." South Asia, he argued, still remained one of the world's less developed regions despite its advantages. "Our individual and collective struggle to march forward on the road to development has been impaired by weak intra-regional cooperation, compounded by mutual suspicion. I hope your conference also devotes attention to improving regional economic cooperation for the benefit of all our peoples."

The Hindu, 10 October 2004

Russia calls for a liberal visa regime

New Delhi, Oct. 9. Russia has called for a more liberal visa regime with India, as it would help further improve bilateral and economic ties. Addressing India Inc. at a meeting organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, observed that the visa regime with India was less liberal compared to other countries and said the two traditional friends "have agreed to urgently formalise the negotiation between the two consulates." He expressed optimism that India and Russia would soon sign an agreement, on the lines of one Russia had with France and Italy. India-Russia economic linkages would further improve by establishing direct links with Russian provinces and Indian States, Mr. Lavrov said and commented that such an arrangement would provide the much-needed fillip to the small and medium enterprises of both the countries.

The Hindu, 10 October 2004

Dhaka protest against 'BSF action' (Haroon Habib)

Dhaka, Oct. 9. An embankment cut across the Sonai river in the Satkhira district of Bangladesh, allegedly by the Border Security Force, has triggered flash floods in the villages adjoining West Bengal. The Satkhira Deputy Commissioner, Mohammad Elias, and Commandant of Bangladesh's Satkhira 12 Rifles Battalion, Lt. Col. Farhad Ahmed, said that BSF men, along with some Indian nationals, crossed the river on Thursday night and cut the embankment. The Bangladesh Rifles has lodged a protest with the BSF over the incident.

The Hindu, 10 October 2004

India, Nepal technical group on flood control

New Delhi, Oct. 9. The second meeting of the India-Nepal Joint Committee on Water Resources - held after a gap of four years - decided on Friday to appoint a technical group to prepare a joint strategy for flood management and mitigation in view of the severity of floods this year and the suffering it caused on both sides. The group will prepare a comprehensive long- and short-term strategy and report to the committee in three months. To give a push to long pending hydropower projects, the committee also agreed to form a joint team of experts on outstanding issues on the 5,600 MW Pancheshwar multi-purpose project and inter-related issues relating to the preparation of the Detailed Project Report, including the possibility of locating the re-regulating dam at Rupaligad. It was agreed to share power from the dam on a 50:50 basis. But the ticklish issue of sharing cost of power generation has been referred to a Power Exchange Committee. The second meeting of the committee, led by the Water Resources Secretary, V.K. Duggal, and his Nepalese counterpart, Mahendra Nath Aryal, here was held in an atmosphere of "warmth and total understanding". Representatives from the flood-prone States of Bihar, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh were part of the Indian delegation.

The Hindu, 11 October 2004

Foreign Ministers of India, Russia, China to meet on October 21 (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, Oct. 10. The Foreign Ministers of India, Russia and China will meet on the sidelines of an international conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on October 21 as part of their annual consultations on a range of issues, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, has announced. In an exclusive interview to The Hindu on Saturday night, Mr. Lavrov said the meeting was about shared values on how to approach international relations. "It's about our common belief that multilateral approaches are the best solution to global problems and regional conflicts. It's certainly our belief that our three countries can do a lot together to keep and promote stability in the Asia-Pacific region, Eurasia in general and in the United Nations." Referring to the adoption of the Russian-sponsored October 8 United Nations Security Council resolution, Mr. Lavrov said this would make the extradition of wanted persons easier. The resolution, among other things, also called upon all countries to remove hurdles in the path of India's comprehensive counter-terrorist convention pending at the U.N. Mr. Lavrov said that both India and Russia were dissatisfied with the current levels of trade. Wanting India to recognise Russia as a market economy, he said an official decision from New Delhi was still awaited. Asked whether Russia was prepared to expand cooperation in civilian nuclear power generation beyond the Koodankulam plant, Mr. Lavrov said this would have to be situated in the context of Russia's international commitment, including under the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

The Tribune, 11 October 2004

WTO should protect small farmers' interests: India

New Delhi, Oct. 10. India has called upon the developed countries to protect the interests of small and marginal farmers in the WTO while negotiating on agriculture. Inaugurating the sixth meeting of the Asian Farmers Group for Cooperations (AFGC) here, the Minister of State for Agriculture, Food and Civil Supplies, Mr Kanti Lal Bhuria, said the interest of developing countries must not be sacrificed at the WTO negotiations. He said agriculture was the backbone of the majority of people in Asia and farmers in the region faced various problems due to seasonal fluctuations. The WTO should protect the rights of the farmers in the developing countries in an equitable and transparent manner, he said. The two-day conference, hosted by the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI), is organised by JA Zenchu, Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives in Japan,

with representatives from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Sri Lanka, Korea, Malaysia and Taiwan.

The Pioneer, 11 October 2004

'Protests against Atal's '99 Pak visit stage-managed' (PTI)

Islamabad. Pakistan's Intelligence agencies had stage-managed violent protests during the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 1999 Lahore visit, deposed premier Nawaz Sharif said, accusing Gen Pervez Musharraf of keeping the top leadership in the dark over Kargil operations. "As the Chief of Army Staff, Pervez Musharraf ventured into a tactical conflict having strategic ramifications with India on Kargil without even taking into confidence the Prime Minister, naval and air chiefs," Sharif said refuting former Prime Minister Shujaat Hussain's July statement that Sharif was briefed about the Kargil operations. Sharif claimed that Intelligence agencies had orchestrated the agitation during Vajpayee's Lahore peace initiative visit. "It was later revealed to me that the stone pelting on the cars of diplomats and processions against Vajpayee's visit to Lahore in February, 1999 were stage-managed and orchestrated by the agencies through a politico-religious party," Sharif said in an interview to the weekend magazine of Dawn daily. Though Sharif does not name the religious outfit, the Jamat-e-Islami had held the protests against Vajpayee's visit and the Pakistan Government had even registered cases against its leaders for the violent agitation. Musharraf had not informed his fellow corps commanders, the chiefs of the navy and the air force about the Kargil operations, Sharif. Musharraf, after the Kargil debacle, deposed Sharif as Prime Minister in a bloodless coup in October 1999. Sharif has been living in exile in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia since then.

The Telegraph, 11 October 2004

Delhi puts Dhaka on hold (Pranay Sharma)

New Delhi, Oct. 10. India is yet to give the nod for the Bangladesh foreign minister's proposed visit to Delhi later this month. Morshed Khan had expressed his desire to come here on October 24 to invite Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Dhaka for the Saarc summit scheduled for early January. The proposal for Morshed's visit has been lying with South Block for some time now. On the face of it, Bangladesh may be told that the proposed dates are not convenient as foreign minister K. Natwar Singh and the Prime Minister will be busy with prior engagements. But Delhi may suggest alternative dates to ensure its relations with Dhaka do not nose-dive further. The final word will be that of Natwar Singh, who recently met Morshed on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. The yearly foreign office consultation is scheduled for November 8 and 9 in Delhi. A growing view is that Bangladesh's mood be gauged at the meeting before accepting Morshed's visit. A section of the foreign ministry establishment has still not forgiven Morshed for recently accusing Delhi of a "big brotherly" attitude towards Dhaka. Delhi is also unhappy with Dhaka's response to repeated alerts about the existence of camps of northeastern militants in Bangladesh.

The Hindu, 12 October 2004

Free movement of media products across SAARC nations favoured

New Delhi, Oct. 11. The Union Information and Broadcasting Minister, S. Jaipal Reddy, today advocated the free movement of media products - publications or television programmes - across the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries so as to foster a better understanding of each other. Addressing the first national conference on 'Working of Press Laws and Right to Information,' organised by the South Asian Free Media Association (India Chapter) here, Mr. Reddy assured the gathering that he would pursue the matter. No country in the region could afford to simultaneously prepare for war and poverty and there was a need to rise above narrow nationalism, he said. Mr. Reddy echoed the views of the former Minister for Disinvestment, Arun Shourie, on various media-related issues. Mr. Reddy said, "I agree with Mr. Shourie," who argued that it was not laws but the content of newspapers and news programmes and the conduct of journalists that mattered. Mr. Reddy lamented the absence of plurality in content. "All television channels and newspapers are producing same analytical content and there is not much diversion of perception." He cited the 14th Lok Sabha elections as an example, when most publications and television channels made similar predictions.

The Hindu, 12 October 2004

No precondition for talks: Pakistan (B. Muralidhar Reddy)

Islamabad, Oct. 11. Pakistan today insisted that there were no pre-conditions such as the stopping of cross border terrorism attached for dialogue with India. The Foreign Office spokesman, Masood Khan, told the weekly news conference that the issue of cross border terrorism was not relevant and Pakistan had clarified on the subject repeatedly. The violation of human rights was the 'real issue'. He was responding to a question at the briefing on observations made by the External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, at a SAFMA meeting in New Delhi on Saturday that the India-Pakistan normalisation process was linked to delivery on promises made by Pakistan to stop cross border terrorism. "There are no conditions for talks. If we go back to the year 2000, it was at that time people talked about preconditions but now that we started the dialogue process, there are no preconditions," Mr. Khan said. He maintained that the first cycle of the Composite Dialogue process had been completed which President Pervez Musharraf's and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's meeting followed on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly. "There is a momentum. I think in everybody's interest, such controversial statement should be avoided to keep the positive spirit of talks."

Indian Express, 12 October 2004

Silk Route province for direct air link to Delhi

New Delhi, Oct. 11. Reviving ties dating back to the famed Silk Route, one of China's most resource-rich provinces has suggested direct air services between Xinjiang and India. The proposal has come from Ismail Tiliwaldi, chairman of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, now visiting India. The delegation wants to do the groundwork for starting air links so that

when India and China rework their existing air agreement next year, the new route can be finalised. The delegation from China will be holding talks with Civil Aviation Secretary Ajay Prasad on Tuesday. Guan Wu Ping, Director of Civil Aviation Administration in Urumqi, said the the air bilateral agreement will have to be modified to cater to such direct flights. Apart from discussing the overall increase in flights, the agreement would have to include the new ports of call. At present, China Eastern Airlines operates return flights twice a week from Beijing to Delhi via Shanghai while one more is expected to be added to this list on November 1. China Eastern is interested in expanding its operations and is looking to fly to cities like Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore.

The Telegraph, 12 October 2004

India set to get more British jobs (Amit Roy)

London, Oct. 11. Britain's second-largest general insurance group, Royal & Sun Alliance, is to save £10 million a year by outsourcing 1,100 jobs in call centres, administration and processing to India over the next two years. Anticipating an angry reaction from the unions, Duncan Boyle, the UK chief executive of Royal & Sun Alliance, explained: "We are in a very competitive environment and processing some of our work in India will not only help us control costs but also give us greater operational flexibility." The insurance group already has 100 staff attached to a pilot office in Bangalore, to which many of the new jobs will be moved. The 1,100 jobs being shifted represent 10 per cent of the UK workforce. The chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown, has spoken of the "challenge" posed to the economy of Britain by India and China. David Fleming, the national secretary of Amicus, the biggest private-sector union, said today: "This announcement clearly shows that offshoring presents an unprecedented threat to UK jobs and the economy. Over 8,000 job losses have been announced over the last few weeks". Norwich Union has already announced it is to transfer thousands of jobs to India by 2007.

The Pioneer, 12 October 2004

India sending more troops to Congo

New Delhi, Oct. 12. India has accepted the United Nations' plea to increase its troops' presence in Congo and will shortly despatch a brigade there, Defence Secretary Ajai Vikram Singh said here on Monday. Having already deployed a contingent of the Indian Air Force (IAF) including helicopters and airport maintenance crew in the strife-torn country as part of the UN peace-keeping mission, India would further upgrade its presence there with a brigade (3,000 men), he said. Stating this here while delivering the inaugural address at the national seminar on "Future of Operations -Implications for India," the Defence Secretary said that India always keeps a brigade strength of troops on standby to be deployed in peace-keeping operations. The Government accepted the world body's request of more troops for the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mr Singh said, adding, the deployment of Indian troops to the African country demonstrated India's commitment to peace-keeping. "The IAF had been sent to Congo earlier in 1961, and at that time we lost 39 men, or one-third of the total fatalities we had incurred in UN peace-keeping operations upto now," he observed. The Indian contingent in Congo currently was led by the IAF with a 300-member team equipped with utility and attack helicopters (MI-35) and a 100-member contingent of the elite Para Regiment guarding the base.

The Hindu, 13 October 2004

Ranil calls on Manmohan (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, Oct. 12. The United National Party leader and former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremesinghe, called on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, today. Mr. Wickremesinghe, Leader of the Opposition in Sri Lanka, also met the former Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, and the Leader of the Opposition, L.K. Advani. Sources in the External Affairs Ministry said the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh and Mr. Wickremesinghe reviewed the current situation in Sri Lanka with specific reference to the current state of play in the peace process with the LTTE and the possibility of resuming negotiations between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan Government.

The Hindu, 13 October 2004

"It's immaterial to India" (T.S.Subramanian)

Chennai, Oct.12. "It's not a big event for us," commented Indian missile technologists today on Pakistan's launch today of its surface-to-surface missile Hatf-V (Ghauri) missile. They said that Hatf-V, with its range of 1,500 km, would not be able to target many places in India. They called it "imported stuff." "It is not indigenously developed [in Pakistan] and the whole thing was bought from North Korea. Pakistan had launched Hatf-V several times earlier." They said India had indigenously developed and launched surface-to-surface missiles Prithvi-II and Agni-I. While Prithvi-I had a range of 250 km, Agni-I could target places 750 km. Both could carry nuclear warheads. Agni-I was Pakistan-specific. Agni-II could reach places 2,000 km away. All these had been built indigenously by the Defence Research and Development Organisation. One of the missile technologists said countries developed missiles based on their threat perception. "Our threat perception is 4,000 km. Pakistan's threat perception is something else. Our country is big in size. Pakistan is small in size. So it need not be matcher-to-matcher, range-wise."

The Hindu, 13 October 2004

India keen on transit rights as part of pipeline deal (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, Oct. 12. India wants transit rights to Afghanistan and Iran through Pakistan as part of an agreement on a gas pipeline project, highly-placed sources in South Block told The Hindu. "In turn, we are willing to allow [the] Pakistanis transit rights through India into Bangladesh," the sources said. They were asked if India was willing to look at the gas pipeline project on a "stand alone" basis. They were clear that India was looking at the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project positively, but wanted access for Indian goods through Pakistan into both Afghanistan and Iran. In the larger scheme, New Delhi believes

these routes will take Indian goods into Central Asia as well. For the first time, the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline is on the official, bilateral agenda of discussions between New Delhi and Islamabad. The joint statement issued by the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and India on September 8 had "recognised the importance of availability and access to energy resources in the region around South Asia." "The Ministers of Petroleum/Gas could meet to discuss the issue in its multifarious dimensions," the statement issued by Natwar Singh and Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri had said. The pipeline also figured in the September 24 talks between the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, and the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

The Hindu, 14 October 2004

China welcomes investment in oil and gas sector

New Delhi, Oct. 13. The Chinese Ambassador, Hua Junduo, has proposed that India and China should explore the possibility of "mutual investment" in hydrocarbons. Speaking after meeting the Petroleum Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar, he said Indian companies are welcome to invest in oil and gas exploration and production in China. Similarly, Chinese oil companies would also explore prospects for investing in the refining, exploration and production as well as petrochemicals sectors. He said his country was greatly interested in the Asian oil buyers-sellers meeting that Mr. Aiyar had convened in January next year. This would bring the four big Asian importing countries of India, China, Korea and Japan together at a meeting with major oil exporters such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran.

The Hindu, 14 October 2004

Russia building nuclear submarines for India (Vladimir Radyuhin)

Moscow, Oct. 13. Russia is building two nuclear submarines for the Indian Navy, a leading business daily here reported. The construction of two unfinished nuclear submarines of Project 971 resumed this month at the Amur Shipyards in Komsomolsk-on-the-Amur, the Kommersant newspaper said. The building of the submarines was suspended several years ago due to lack of funds. Under an agreement with Russia, India will lease the two submarines and will provide money to enable the Amur Shipyards to complete their construction. According to the report, India has already made an advance payment of \$100 million on the contract worth \$1.6 billion to \$1.7 billion. Even though there are no international restrictions on the sale of nuclear submarines to India, the Defence Ministers emphatically denied they had as much as discussed the deal during their meeting in Delhi in January. The Project 971 improved version of Akula-II class submarine is a far more formidable man of war than a Charlie-class nuclear submarine India leased from Russia in 1988-1991.

The Hindu, 14 October 2004

Naval ships on 45-day trip to South-East Asia

New Delhi, Oct. 13. Five Indian naval ships have departed on a 45-day visit to several South-East Asian nations as part of its diplomacy. The group will split into two and visit Pusan (South Korea), Tokyo, Manila, Ho Chi Minh City and Jakarta. This is the region where the Indian Navy has conducted extensive and regular naval cooperation programmes after emerging from isolation in the Nineties, owing to its interest in maritime security in the region. Official sources said the Indian Navy emphasised on improving mutual understanding and the trip would provide the ideal platform for greater professional interaction. The visit would also spread goodwill among India's maritime neighbours.

The Hindu, 14 October 2004

'India, Australia ties should move beyond declarations'

Chennai, Oct. 13. Australia wants more "meat" and "muscle" in the counter terrorism cooperation treaty that it had signed with India. "Let us come down from ministerial declarations to practical on-the-ground cooperation between our experts. Let us accelerate the process to our mutual benefit," said the Australian High Commissioner to India, Penelope Wensley, while answering questions at the Madras University Department of Defence and Strategic Studies after a lecture on 'Australian perspectives on regional security issues.' Defining the progress so far as "more than just on paper" after the treaty was signed last August, she underlined the need for more exchanges between experts of both countries at the working level. Ms. Wensley said the tempo of defence cooperation had picked up with a series of exchanges and visits. The naval cooperation should move beyond port calls of ships of both countries to "something more practical." But she was aware of the "practical constraints" to take the relationship "to the next step." This was because the two navies were involved in a lot of activities on their own now, she said.

The Hindu, 14 October 2004

No visa needed for travel to Mauritius

Chennai, Oct. 13. As part of its efforts to promote business and tourist traffic from India, the Mauritius Government has announced that "no visas" are required for a 15-day stay, provided the visitors have a confirmed return air ticket and sufficient funds. Addressing a press conference here today, the Honorary Consul for the Republic of Mauritius, V. Raman, said this visa relaxation follows the opening up of the civil aviation sector, especially on the South Asian regional routes, to private carriers. This visa relaxation would provide a boost to the Information Technology professionals, prospective Indian business investors and tourist traffic. He said he was confident that the decision would spur travel agents in India to come up with attractive packages for medium budget tourists. Sports tourism, eco-tourism and film tourism would be the focus of their campaign to woo tourists of all ages. Seventyeight per cent of people of Mauritius are of Indian origin, of which one-third constitute those of Tamil origin.

The Hindu, 14 October 2004

India denies Bangladesh media reports (Haroon Habib)

Dhaka, Oct.13. The Indian authorities here have denied Bangladeshi media reports regarding the breaching of an embankment in Satkhira, causing floods in the vast southern villages. A press release of the Indian High Commission here said: "Neither the BSF nor any other Indian nationals crossed into Bangladesh territory. The allegation made in these media reports that the BSF or Indian nationals, aided by the BSF, entered Bangladesh to deliberately breach an embankment located 250 metres within Bangladeshi territory at Satkhira is completely false." It said the reports were referred to the authorities concerned in India who had conducted an investigation. The BSF had never encouraged nor did it condone such acts by Indian nationals, more so in the territory of another country. This had already been unambiguously conveyed to the BDR officials during a flag meeting held on October 8 to assess the facts in the situation, the press release said.

The Pioneer, 14 October 2004

Shaukat may visit India next month (PTI)

Islamabad.Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz will undertake a visit to six SAARC countries next month and plans to arrive in New Delhi in the last leg of his tour. Aziz, the former Citibank vice president who took over as Prime Minister in August, would begin his tour with a visit to Bangladesh, which will be hosting the SAARC summit next year, and wind up with a visit to New Delhi in the second leg."On the first leg of his regional tour Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz will visit Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, and on the second he will visit Sri Lanka, Maldives and India."Pakistan foreign office officials said. The dates for his visits were currently under process, they were quoted as saying by local daily Dawn. Aziz's visit to India was considered significant in the context of the ongoing peace process as he will be the first Pakistani leader to visit New Delhi after President Pervez Musharraf's visit to attend the Agra Summit in July 2001.Aziz's meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was also considered an important follow up to the first meeting between Mr Singh and Musharraf at New York last month.

The Hindu, 15 October 2004

Tatas sign \$2 billion deal with Bangladesh (Haroon Habib)

Dhaka, Oct. 14. The Tata group has signed an Expression of Interest (Eoi) with the Bangladesh's Board of Investment (BoI), getting a go-ahead for its planned \$2 billion investment, the biggest investment in the country since independence. The deal sets the ground for a series of negotiations on the Tata group's intent on setting up a 1,000 MW power station (in two phases), a steel mill with a capacity of 4.2 lakh tonnes annually (also in two phases), and a one million tonne fertilizer unit. All the plants will be based on the country's natural gas. The Government said it would now evaluate with donors' help the pricing and supply of gas for the proposed plants. The demand list of the Tata group, making the huge investment, includes uninterrupted supply of gas for its proposed plants for 20 years, a competitive price for the gas they would use, quick facilitation of its investment proposal and selection of suitable sites. It is learnt that the Government, in principle, has agreed to most conditions but the main point of negotiations would be centred on the pricing and supply of natural gas. The much-publicised signing ceremony was held here yesterday, where the visiting Tata group Chairman, Ratan N. Tata, and senior Bangladesh ministers including the Finance and Planning Minister, M. Saifur Rahman, the Foreign Minister, M. Morshed Khan, and the Indian High Commissioner, Veena Sikri, were present.

The Hindu, 15 October 2004

'Rule of law being enforced in Fiji'

New Delhi, Oct. 14. Fiji's former Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, said today that the rule of law was being enforced in the Pacific island nation. Pointing to the sentences handed down to key persons in Government for their role in the 2000 coup that ousted him from power, Mr. Chaudhry said that law enforcement authorities had cracked down on them. "We are happy to see the rule of law being established," Mr. Chaudhry, who heads the Fiji Labour Party, said at a press conference. The Fijian leader, who paid a courtesy call on the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, on Wednesday night, said he updated him on the current situation in Fiji. He also met the former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Labour Party leader said his party, despite a court order, had still not been able to join the Laisenia Qarase Government, as envisaged by the country's 1997 Constitution. Though he was bound to include his party in government, the Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, offered inconsequential portfolios to his party to keep him out, Mr. Chaudhry alleged. Also, the offer to join the Government was not extended to Mr. Chaudhry personally. The former Prime Minister claimed that the previous governments in Fiji had not submitted compliance reports to the United Nations for the past 15 to 16 years, despite being a party to a U.N. Convention on elimination of all forms of racism.

The Hindu, 15 October 2004

Sein Win denied visa to attend pro-democracy conference (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, Oct. 14. The Government has denied a visa to Sein Win, "Prime Minister" of the National Coalition "Government" of the Union of Burma (Myanmar), to attend a three-day international convention for the restoration of democracy in Myanmar, which begins here on Friday. Addressing a press conference today, the former Defence Minister, George Fernandes, one of the organisers of the conference, said there was not much change in the situation in Burma between the time he had organised a conference in 1996 and now. Mr. Fernandes faced a barrage of questions about his silence on restoring democracy in Myanmar when he was in Government. Mr. Fernandes said that as Defence Minister he had a job to do, but as a citizen he was entitled to his views. Denying that the timing of the conference was in any way linked to the October 25 visit of Myanmar's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Chairman, Senior General Than Shwe, Mr. Fernandes said this meeting had been planned months in advance. Dr. Sein Wein, in a message to the convention, was polite, but direct in his concerns about India's role and relationship with Myanmar. "Even though I cannot be there to meet you all personally for various reasons, I am confident that my message will be taken seriously both for the sake of my country, Burma, and also for India."

Indian Express, 15 October 2004

Bhutan nod to SSB patrol along border

New Delhi, Oct. 14. India and Bhutan have agreed to undertake specific measures to strengthen security along the border, including the deployment of SSB forces from the Indian side. This was agreed during External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh's brief visit to Bhutan on Tuesday. He held a two-hour meeting with Bhutan King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. Apart from SSB deployment, the two sides have also set up a regular consultation mechanism among officials of border districts. Both leaders expressed satisfaction on the formation of a bilateral group on border management and security. It's learnt that GOC-in-C Eastern Command J.S. Verma met officials of the Bhutanese Army on September 15 as part of the consultation mechanism. The Bhutan King is said to have assured Singh there were no camps in Bhutan of groups active in the North-East.

The Hindu, 16 October 2004

Fernandes for collective pressure for Suu Kyi's release

New Delhi, Oct. 15. As India gets ready to roll out the red carpet for Myanmar's Head of the State, Than Shwe, the former Defence Minister, George Fernandes, today called for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and restoration of democracy in Myanmar. Speaking at the Second International Convention for Restoration of Democracy in Burma, being held after a gap of eight years, Mr. Fernandes predicted dire consequences for the South-East Asian region unless India and her neighbours "come together to restore democracy in Myanmar." He highlighted the inadequacies of the present regime, pointing out that the Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Index indicated that Myanmar had dropped from 127 to 132 in two years. "Obviously the Prime Minister, Khin Nyunt, is not aware of the state of the economy and provides figures that are not open to scrutiny," he said, quoting facts from the International Crisis Group's latest report on Aid to Border Areas in Myanmar. Speaking on the need for the international community to come together as one on the issue, the co-chairperson of Political Defiance for Burma, Kim Sangwoo, from Korea said: "Unless we work together, we will not be so effective."

The Hindu, 16 October 2004

Celebrating Delhi-Hanoi ties (P.S. Suryanarayana)

Hanoi, Oct. 15. India and Vietnam are poised to look to the future on their bilateral front in the historic context of the first-ever meeting between Jawaharlal Nehru and Ho Chi Minh. The stroll down memory lane, for visualising new vistas of cooperation, will mark the 50th anniversary celebrations of the first political interaction between Nehru and Ho Chi Minh. India's External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, will attend the celebration in Hanoi, where the now-legendary meeting took place, on October 17. The 12th meeting of the India-Vietnam Joint Commission will take place on the following day, according to diplomatic sources here.

The Hindu, 16 October 2004

Traditional cultures must be made relevant: India

Shanghai, Oct. 15. India today urged the international community to take urgent steps to make traditional cultures relevant, creatively integrate them into the mainstream and not merely focus on how to protect them in an era of unprecedented globalisation. "The key question to be asked is not how to protect traditional cultures, but how to make them relevant," the Union Minister for Culture and Information and Broadcasting, S. Jaipal Reddy, said here. He was making an intervention at the Session on Traditional Cultures and Modernisation at the Seventh Annual Ministerial Meeting of the International Network on Culture Policy (INCP). "We cannot keep our traditional cultures as museum pieces. They are living cultures, which have defined the lives of generations. Suddenly they find that their skills, values and heritage have no relevance," Mr. Reddy said. "As policymakers, it is our challenge to rediscover their continued relevance, utility and value in social cohesion and economic development. They have to be integrated into economic mainstream without losing their cultural identity," he said. The abiding wisdom in traditional cultures needed to be harnessed and integrated with the intellectual mainstream and used for the welfare of society. "At the same time, it has to be ensured that they are not exploited, nor their intellectual property rights abused."

The Tribune, 16 October 2004

Kiwi PM's remark clouds India visit (Rajeev Sharma)

New Delhi, Oct. 15. Days before she arrives here on a state visit, New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clarke seems to have herself cast a shadow over the visit with her controversial remark over Kashmir. The top brass of the Government of India is "surprised" over Ms Clarke's remark which she made in New Zealand Parliament a few days ago during a debate wherein she said that Kashmir was not the internal matter of India, but an international issue. Such a strong remark by New Zealand Premier has foxed the Government of India. Two top officials of the Government of India, when asked by this correspondent whether New Delhi would call off Ms Clarke's visit in the wake of her provocative remarks, replied in the negative. "Diplomacy is not conducted in such a manner. A country has every right to have its individual opinion whether we agree with that or not," an official remarked when asked about the possibility of India cancelling the New Zealand Premier's visit. Ms Clarke arrives here on October 17 for a five-day visit which would be the first India visit by a New Zealand Premier in almost two decades after Prime Minister David Lange visited India in April 1985.

The Hindu, 17 October 2004

India-European Union summit to be held on Nov. 8 (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi., Oct. 16. India's fifth summit with the European Union has now been scheduled for November 8, an official statement posted on the website of the E.U.'s Dutch Presidency said. The summit, which was to have been held originally on October 14 at The Hague, Netherlands, was put off on account of the illness of the Dutch Prime Minister, Jan Peter

Balkenende. A "business summit" was to have been held on October 13. "The postponed E.U.-India Summit will now take place on Monday, November 8, in the Ridderzaal in The Hague. The meeting will be chaired by the President of the European Council, Prime Minister Balkenende. The Indian delegation will be headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The main topic is the strategic partnership between the E.U. and India," the October 15 statement said. South Block sources confirmed that the summit meeting would now take place on November 8. Some scheduling issues that remained had been sorted out, the sources maintained. As mentioned in the Dutch Presidency statement, a detailed document had been submitted to the Government of India on the contours of a strategic partnership. India, too, had worked out a detailed response.

The Hindu, 17 October 2004

Natwar's visit to turn spotlight on ties with Hanoi (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Hanoi, Oct.16. The External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, and the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Dy Nien, will, at a special function here tomorrow, turn the spotlight on a defining moment in the history of bilateral relationship: the meeting, exactly half a century ago, between Jawaharlal Nehru and Ho Chi Minh, in Hanoi. By celebrating the "substantive symbolism" of the Nehru-Ho Chi Minh meeting, the two countries will seek to fashion the future course of their progressive relationship, according to diplomatic sources in Hanoi. Tomorrow's commemorative function, which will set the stage for a meeting of the Vietnam-India Joint Commission on Monday, is being organised by the Hanoi-based Institute for International Relations under the auspices of the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry. In tune with the mood of reminiscences about a memorable event on the bilateral front, the External Affairs Minister will also call on Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, Vietnam's legendary military hero, here on Sunday. This will be followed by yet another thematic function to be organised by the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations. The joint commission, slated to hold on Monday its 12th meeting in an ongoing series, will review the present state of bilateral relations. The new focus would be on the fast-forwarding of the relationship in the context of Vietnam's integration with the global economy, official sources said.

Indian Express, 18 October 2004

For Vietnam, India to open its skies

New Delhi, On the occasion of completion of 50 years of ties with Vietnam, the Indian government is planning several new measures, including opening its skies to the socialist republic and easing visa restrictions, to boost tourism. "The Vietnamese Minister for Tourism Vo Thi Thang, who is here to meet her Indian counterpart Renuka Chowdhury, will discuss several proposals that will further this country's tourism ties with Vietnam," Vietnamese Ambassador Tran Tong Khanh told reporters here. "The Indian government has officially agreed to direct flights to Hanoi in the near future for the promotion of tourism," Khanh said, adding that a common project that is of high social and economic value is to be taken up, visa regulation might also be relaxed, including schemes like "visa on arrival" among other proposals which are likely to be discussed between the two ministers tomorrow. India already has similar arrangements with most of the countries in South-East Asia, including Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. "After 50 years of Indo-Vietnam friendship, we are looking at more tourism opportunities with this country," Nguyen Quy Phuong, Deputy Director-General of Vietnam's Tourism Department said.

Indian Express, 19 October 2004

'India has a bigger role to play in Security Council'

New Delhi, Oct.18. New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clarke, who is scheduled to visit New Delhi later this week for discussions with the Centre, today indicated in Bangalore that she could see a substantially larger role for India in the enlarged United Nations Security Council. "We are working as one of the groups of countries led by Mexico -called 'The Friends of UN Reforms' -and what we are looking for is a change in the Security Council, which reflects the 21st century rather than 1945," she "...We see a role for enhanced regional representation and we find it hard to see that India will not have a bigger role," she added. Clarke's five-day visit to India -the first by a New Zealand PM after David Lange's visit in 1985-is not just aimed at including the inking of a bilateral agreement between the two countries. The New Zealand PM added that she saw the visit as "a genuine effort by both countries to step up the 1950s relations", agreeing that both the countries had changed a lot and there were things that both could cooperatively engage in. "Sectors like information technology are where we can collaborate, but we still have some issues around agriculture access which must be pursued. We see a number of possibilities to freshen up the relationship," added Clarke.

Indian Express, 19 October 2004

PM to head for Hague for Nov 8 Indo-EU summit (Pranab Dhal Samanta)

New Delhi, Oct.18. After the recent confusion that surrounded the cancellation of the annual Indo-EU summit, decks have been cleared for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to visit The Hague for the summit now rescheduled for November 8. The summit was earlier slated for October 13-14 but was called off at the last moment with both sides giving different reasons for the cancellation. While India cited Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende's-The Netherlands currently holds EU presidency -illness as the reason for the postponement, the Dutch Foreign Affairs Ministry stated that India gave "pressing domestic circumstances" as the cause for calling off the summit, the reference being to the Maharashtra elections which coincided with the summit dates. Caught between all this rescheduling is the proposed visit of Nepal King Gyanendra Singh. It's learnt that New Delhi had more or less agreed to the King visiting in the second week of November but was forced to rethink after The Netherlands proposed November 8 as the new date for the summit. However, sources said, New Delhi is already in touch with Kathmandu to work out fresh dates as it was felt that the Indo-EU summit should not be delayed any further. Moreover, India and EU are expected to enter into a strategic partnership agreement during the summit.

The Hindu, 19 October 2004

Vietnam to back India on ASEM membership (P.S.Suryanarayana)

Hanoi, Oct.18. The Vietnamese Prime Minister, Phan Van Khai, today assured the visiting External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, that Hanoi "will help India to join the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting)." Mr. Singh, who called on Mr. Khai, described the offer as "a very big gesture." Both Mr. Khai and the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Dy Nien, "informed" Mr. Singh of their intention to work for India's entry into the ASEM at its next summit. A few days ago, Vietnam hosted the fifth biennial summit of this major inter-continental forum for dialogue on issues of global concern and regional importance. As ASEM, formed at Singapore's initiative, evolved as a grouping of East Asian countries and the European Union, India has not become a member so far. Another significant aspect of Mr. Singh's wide-ranging discussions with the Vietnamese Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister here today was India's explicit articulation of support for Vietnam's candidature for the membership of the World Trade Organisation. Hanoi is keen to join it by 2005.

The Tribune, 19 October 2004

India, UK to hold defence talks

New Delhi, Oct.18. British Chief of General Staff, Lieut-Gen Sir Mike Jackson, who is on a 10-day visit to India will hold discussions with Indian defence officials regarding enhancing bilateral defence cooperation. Although the British Chief of General Staff has been in India since October 15, he was given the official ceremonial welcome today after which he said, "on what is my first visit to India it is evident that the defence relationship between the two countries is in an excellent shape". "I look forward to working out ways to increase that cooperation when I meet Indian Defence Secretary Ajai Vikram Singh, the service chiefs and other senior members of the Indian armed forces," he added about his visit, which would be one of the longest by any British defence official to India. The British Embassy here, in a statement, said Lieut-Gen Jackson would discuss joint training between the two defence forces, expanding annual bilateral exchanges, training courses and defence deals, including joint production. The discussions between the visiting British General and the Indian officials would also cover continued annual bilateral exchanges of cadets and students at defence colleges and staff colleges and fresh initiatives to include exercise observers, mountain and jungle warfare specialists, aircrew, logistics experts and training instructors.

The Hindu, 20 October 2004

Plan to bring in FDI worth \$150 billion

New Delhi, Oct.19. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said today that the Government was working to create a regulatory framework in infrastructure based on best international practices. This would enable the country to absorb as much as \$150 billion of the much-needed foreign investment in the infrastructure sector over the next 10 years. Inaugurating the third India-ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) Business Summit here, he said this would cover airports, railways, power, and telecom sectors.

The Hindu, 20 October 2004

Dixit in Iran; discusses Iraq (Atul Aneja)

Manama, Oct.19. With American forces positioned along its borders in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran's top leaders have discussed the situation in both these countries with the National Security Adviser, J.N. Dixit. Mr. Dixit is the highest-ranking Indian official to visit Iran after the United Progressive Alliance Government assumed office. "The visit has high symbolic value as it shows continuity and a desire by both countries to add greater content to their relationship," diplomatic sources told The Hindu. On Monday, Mr. Dixit met the Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, the Chairman of the Expediency Council, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, the head of the National Security Council, Hassan Rouhani, and the Speaker of the newly elected Parliament (Majlis), Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel. Mr. Dixit's talks follow a visit last month by Indian naval warships to Iran's Persian Gulf port of Bandar Abbas. Both sides discussed the proposed Iran-India gas pipeline through Pakistan. Mr. Rafsanjani said that a rapprochement between New Delhi and Islamabad would help implement this project. He pointed out that the pipeline would have a regional impact as it would encourage development and enhance security among the three countries.

The Telegraph, 20 October 2004

Israel date next month (Pranay Sharma)

New Delhi, Oct.19. The first major official contact between India and Israel since the Congress-led Centre came to power will happen next month when the two sides meet here for foreign office consultations. There are strong indications that Israel may even reopen its consulate in Mumbai before the two meetings begin. It was closed some years ago because of lack of funds. But the significant growth in trade and tourist traffic over the past few years has forced Israel to consider reopening the consulate. The exact dates of the meetings, both in November, are being worked out. At the first - to be held at the secretary level - the gamut of bilateral relations will be reviewed. The counter-terrorism group will allow the two sides to further deepen their cooperation in an area of common concern that also plays an important part in their foreign policy. Soon after the UPA came to power in May, there was speculation in some quarters that the upward graph in bilateral ties would be affected. The new ruling coalition's common minimum programme laid a lot of emphasis on strengthening India's "traditional relations" with the Palestinian authority and the Arab world, but glossed over Delhi's growing ties with Tel Aviv.

The Hindu, 21 October 2004

New Zealand keen on improving trade

New Delhi, Oct.20. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, today called for greater trade co-operation between India and New Zealand, despite constrained growth of exports in the past. "Our export growth has been constrained by continuing high levels of protection in India and by our high exchange rate. Nonetheless, I believe we can do better," she said at a meeting organised jointly by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Confederation of Indian

Industry. The trade balance between New Zealand and India has improved from a negative \$32.3 million in 1999-2000 to \$6.19 million in 2003-04. The Prime Minister of New Zealand identified the areas of interest for ICT (information and communication technology) companies from India to include energy sector applications, e-government, utility sector and banking and finance systems among others. "We have a successful tourism sector; high value niche manufacturing and marine exports, highly researched and developed fruits and wines, and lively creative sectors across film and television, contemporary music, fashion design and new media." The areas of fastest growth in the economic relationship is in two areas of the services sector which have a strong people to people component, namely, in tourism and education, she said.

The Hindu, 21 October 2004

'Myanmar must implement commitment to multi-party system'

New Delhi, Oct.20. India believes that the Myanmar Government should implement its own commitment to "multi-party" democracy, sources in the External Affairs Ministry said ahead of the October 25 visit of Senior General Than Shwe to New Delhi. Asked whether India should not call for restoration of democracy in Myanmar, the sources said India had not shied away from the issue. "We believe that this commitment [to multi-party] democracy should be adhered to." However, the sources made it clear that India looked at Myanmar through the prism of its security concerns and economic linkages with South-East Asia. Whether it was a democratic or military government in Myanmar, India's "strategic compulsions" will not change. As of now there was no change in the scheduled visit of Senior General Than Shwe despite the arrest of the former Prime Minister, Khin Nyunt, on Monday night in Yangon. India's assessment is that the removal of Gen. Khin Nyunt and the appointment of Gen. Soe Win as Prime Minister "reflected differences" at the top level of the military government in Myanmar. A troika comprising Senior General Than Shwe, Mr. Khin Nyunt and Vice Senior General Maung Aye, had held sway until recently.

The Hindu, 22 October 2004

India, Russia, China for U.N. reform (Siddharth Varadarajan)

Almaty, Oct.21. The Foreign Ministers of India, Russia and China met here today - the third such trilateral meeting in as many years - and reaffirmed their commitment to fight terrorism and drug trafficking. Stressing the need for the three countries regularly to exchange views to "strengthen a collective approach to world affairs," the Ministers also decided that they would jointly examine the issue of United Nations reform - including the question of restructuring the Security Council - when the U.N. Secretary-General's High-level Panel on New Threats, Challenges and Change submits its report this December. Though there was no formal joint statement after their hour-long meeting, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, the Indian External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, and the Chinese Foreign Minister, Li Zhaoxing, told reporters they had a commonality of approach and emphasis on the issue of terrorism.

The Hindu, 22 October 2004

'India, U.K. planning joint military exercises' (Shujaat Bukhari)

Srinagar, Oct.21. India and the United Kingdom are planning joint military exercises and will continue to work to strengthen the close bilateral ties, the Chief of General Staff of British Army, Mike Jackson, has said. After discussions with top Army commanders, led by Hari Prasad, General Officer Commanding, Northern Command, Gen. Jackson told the reporters today that the joint exercises would take place in spring somewhere in North India. He said that there were many historical links between the two countries and that he was in Kashmir to learn more about this part of the country and have a better understanding of the situation. He said that the Commanders told him that the situation in Kashmir was improving. "We must remember that such a situation is not a matter of military operations alone. There must be political progress, economic progress and social development..."

The Pioneer, 23 October 2004

Myanmar's head of state to visit India next week

New Delhi. The relation between the two neighbours - India and Myanmar - will take a step forward with the signing of an accord in the field of non-traditional security issues when Senior General Than Shwe visits Delhi on Monday next. The two countries are also expected to finalise an agreement on counter-terrorism. The six-day state visit of senior general Than Shwe is the first by a head of state from Myanmar in 17 years. In all likelihood, India will convey its serious concerns over Northeastern insurgent groups operating from Myanmar to General Shwe. India and Myanmar share a 1,400 km-long border in the North-east. General Than's visit was also expected to contribute significantly in further consolidating and expanding bilateral relations between the two countries, sources said here on Friday adding that cultural exchange programme agreement for 2004-06 and another MoU on the Tamanthi hydroelectric project in Myanmar would also be signed during the visit. General Than, chairman of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), would be accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising eight Cabinet ministers heading industry, energy, rail transportation, communications, science and technology and health.

The Hindu, 24 October 2004

Asian conference approves CBMs (Siddharth Varadarajan)

Almaty, Oct.23. Sixteen Asian countries - including India - took a significant step towards cementing strategic ties with each other by committing themselves to a number of confidence-building measures (CBMs) in the military, political, economic and cultural spheres. The catalogue of CBMs adopted by the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) here on October 22 is far-ranging but Indian officials said the process under way should not be thought of as one only focusing on security issues. "We are not looking here at an Asian model of the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe," said a senior official, "but one which has an equal focus on socio-economic and cultural priorities. We don't think the OSCE, with its excessive focus on military CBMs, is something which is

appropriate for Asia." In his speech at the CICA meet, the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, noted that "since the early Nineties there has been a steady shift in power and influence to Asia. The centre of gravity of global geopolitics and geo-economic affairs is gradually but surely shifting towards Asia and it has been widely acknowledged that the present century could be the 'Asian century'.

The Tribune, 24 October 2004

New citizenship law to benefit Indians

Dubai, Oct.23. More than one million expatriates, including Indians, living for over 10 years in Saudi Arabia, can benefit from an amended naturalisation law which offers them citizenship of the kingdom and related rights. Expatriates of all nationalities, who have been living in the kingdom for over 10 years, are entitled to apply for Saudi citizenship and their travels abroad with re-entry visas will not disqualify them, a senior official said. More than one million expatriates would benefit from the amended naturalisation Law, official sources said. There are nearly 8.8 million expatriates, mostly Asians and Arabs, in the kingdom. The law would take at least four months to come into effect.

The Hindu, 25 October 2004

Consultative meet on WTO negotiations

New Delhi, Oct.24. India will host a three-day meet, starting on Tuesday, to discuss future negotiations at the WTO, particularly on agriculture, non-agriculture market access and service and trade facilitation. The meeting, 'Consultation on the WTO Framework Agreement of July 2004,' is being convened by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development under the 'Strategies and Preparedness for Trade and Globalisation in India' project. The framework agreement lays the contours for the detailed future negotiations at WTO. India along with other developing countries played a major role in the talks that resulted in the agreement on the framework text. The meet will discuss the implications of the agreement on India and other developing countries and has been designed to get the comments of civil society, industry, academia and other stakeholders.

The Hindu, 25 October 2004

Stamp released on India's role in U.N. peace missions

New Delhi, Oct.24. The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, today released a stamp to commemorate 25 years of India's contribution to the United Nations peacekeeping missions. The stamp was released at the Rashtrapathi Bhavan in the presence of top military and civil officials and Minister of State for Communications, Shakeel Ahmed. India has so far participated in 37 U.N. peacekeeping missions, contributing over 70,000 troops in 25 years. At present, India has 3,500 troops engaged in peacekeeping operations in Congo, Eritrea and Lebanon. The Congo mission would be upgraded to a brigade group this year while a battalion is being sent to Sudan in 2005. Addressing the function, the President said the Army may constitute a task team of its personnel presently working in U.N. missions and commanders who had worked in the past to collate their experiences and prepare a book on peacekeeping experiences. "This will become a vital training document for our troops during future operations and also an interesting archival information for military historians," he said. Mr. Kalam said it was essential to evolve the principle of "enlightened citizenship" in many of the countries based on Asian ethos to reduce the tensions in the world that are transforming into wars.

The Hindu, 25 October 2004

Afghan Sikhs seek overland entry into India

Kabul, Oct.24. Afghan Sikhs, trickling back to their homeland after the ouster of the fundamentalist Taliban regime, have appealed to India to allow them to travel between the two countries overland via Pakistan. Ravinder Singh, a member of the Afghan Gurdwara Prabhanda Committee, complained to visiting Indian newsmen here recently that most of the Sikh families could not afford direct air travel to India. "We appeal to the Indian Government to allow us entry overland via Pakistan," he said. India had imposed a ban on overland entry of Afghan Sikhs following warning from intelligence agencies that Pakistan was trying to infiltrate Sikh extremists in the garb of Afghan Sikhs. Restrictions had also been enforced as after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghan security agencies had come across evidence of some Sikh youths undergoing arms training in ISI-run camps near Kabul and in northern Afghanistan. While not ruling out reports of "a few misguided youths" undergoing training in such camps, Mr. Singh said these were Sikh expatriates living in Europe and Australia and not the Afghan Sikhs. He said Sikhs and Hindus, who once constituted a population of over 5,00,000 in Afghanistan, now accounted for only a hundred families that had come back after the ouster of the Taliban regime.

The Telegraph, 26 October 2004

Focus on rebels in Myanmar pact (Pranay Sharma)

New Delhi, Oct.25. Visiting Myanmar military ruler Senior General Than Shwe today told his hosts his country will not allow its soil to be used by Northeast insurgents against Indian interests. The State Peace and Development Committee chairman also expressed his "sincere commitment" to restore democracy in his country, a week after ousting a fellow general credited with setting in motion a roadmap for change. The military strongman, the first head of government from Yangon to visit India in 24 years, said it was the only way to bring peace and prosperity to his country. If Shwe promised a co-ordinated operation with Indian troops along the 1,400-km border between the two countries, it was not said publicly. But expressing the intent to do so, Myanmar today signed a memorandum of understanding with India for cooperation in "non-traditional security issues". It was explained later that the MoU would enhance cooperation between the two sides against terrorism, arms smuggling, money laundering, drug trafficking, international economic violations and cyber crimes. Two other MoUs on cooperation in hydroelectric projects in Myanmar and for stronger cultural ties were also signed.

The Hindu, 27 October 2004

India seeks strategic energy alliance with Russia (Vladimir Radyuhin)

Moscow, Oct.26. India is seeking a strategic energy alliance with Russia that would guarantee India's energy security and recast global energy equations. "In the first half century of Indian Independence Russia has guaranteed our territorial integrity, and in the second half century it may be able to guarantee our energy security," the Petroleum Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar, told Indian mediapersons here after talks with top Russian energy officials and oil and gas majors. "What I am talking about [is] the strategic alliance with Russia in energy security, which is becoming for India at least as important as our national security." During his four-day visit to Russia that ended today, Mr. Aiyar discussed proposals that would enable India to get direct access to Russia's booming oil and gas production and to join forces with Russia to form an Asian oil products market.

The Hindu, 28 October 2004

French Minister declines comment on controversy

New Delhi, Oct.27. The French Foreign Minister, Michel Barnier, today declined to comment on the employment of middlemen by Dassault International on the ground that the courts were still hearing the case. Also, the Indian authorities had "clearly stated the position." While admitting that the French Government normally backed its companies on armament deals, he said it was not privy to the discussions that took place between the French businessmen and Indian authorities. Despite the court case against Dassault International filed by a Panama-based company which claims it was instrumental in pushing the deal for the sale of 10 Mirage-2000 fighter jets to India, Mr. Barnier said he would discuss another, larger deal for submarines with the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee.

Indian Express, 29 October 2004

On Myanmar, Govt tells Left to get real (Diptosh Majumdar)

New Delhi, Oct.28. The Government today bluntly told the Left that it could not afford to alienate Myanmar by raking up the restoration-of-democracy issue at a time when China was building even better ties with Yangon. Left leaders who met PM Manmohan Singh over breakfast were told that the relatively new Kunming-Mandalay road was bringing the Chinese closer to the military rulers in politically isolated Myanmar. Left leaders yesterday raised the "politically correct issue" of Aung San Suu Kyi continuing to be under house arrest and demanded that New Delhi tell the Yangon regime to restore democracy soon. But at this morning's meeting at 7 Race Course Road, National Security Advisor J N Dixit reminded Left leaders that it was the Congress government of the Nineties that had bestowed the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Award on Aung San Suu Kyi. The sympathy for Suu Kyi remained but the Government, Dixit pointed out, had to do business with Yangon for security and strategic reasons.

The Tribune, 29 October 2004

PM takes up turban issue with French Foreign Minister

New Delhi, Oct.28. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had personally taken up the issue of the Sikh community's turban issue in France with visiting Foreign Minister Michel Barnier. Dr Manmohan Singh informed Mr Barnier that wearing turbans was a religious symbol for the Sikhs and not an item of display. External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh also explained to his French counterpart the religious sentiments of the Sikh community in wearing the turban. National Commission for Minorities Chairman Tarlochan Singh followed up the turban controversy in government-run schools in France with Mr Barnier at a dinner hosted by the French Ambassador last night. Mr Barnier categorically told Mr Tarlochan Singh that France would provide full protection to the Sikh community and there was no anti-Sikh feeling in his country. The French Foreign Minister said all students of the Sikh community barring three had been admitted to schools. The problem pertaining to these three students on wearing turbans or patkas will be resolved on his return to France in the next 10 days, Mr Barnier assured.

The Hindu, 30 October 2004

Gorbachev lauds India's development policy (Vladimir Radyuhin)

Moscow, Oct.29. The former Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev, said he was happy with the path of development followed by India. India has chosen the right course unlike some other countries, Mr. Gorbachev was quoted as telling India's Ambassador, Kanwal Sibal. The envoy called on the last Soviet leader on Thursday. Mr. Gorbachev said his attitude to India, which was always very friendly, had become even more positive and respectful now. He "has full confidence in the great future of India and its great people," said a press release issued by the Indian Embassy today. The Indian media was not invited to the meeting. The last leader of the Soviet Union said he had always favoured a strong and dynamically growing India. He described India as Russia's strong strategic partner.

The Hindu, 30 October 2004

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

New Delhi, Oct.29. Singapore has supported India's bid to enter the United Nations' Security Council as a permanent member. In an interview to The Hindu, the visiting Singapore Deputy Prime Minister, Tony Tan, said his country backed New Delhi's "proposal" for a permanent seat on the Council. Singapore thought that India's entry would be "appropriate and logical," Dr. Tan said on Thursday during a visit to Gurgaon. It is for the first time that the South-East Asian nation has made a public statement in favour of India's candidature. Asked whether Singapore supported the conversion of the Association of South-East Asian Nations "plus three" (Japan, South Korea and China) entity into an "ASEAN plus four" that would include India, Dr. Tan said his country supported all initiatives for India to engage more closely with ASEAN countries.

The Hindu, 30 October 2004

E.U. planning 'strategic ties' with India

New Delhi, Oct.29. The European Union today declared its intention to build an ambitious "strategic partnership" with India focussing on the four key areas of international cooperation through multilateralism, strengthening economic ties, cooperation in development policies, and interaction among civil societies. The forthcoming Indo-E.U. Summit in The Hague on November 8 to be attended by the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, is expected to launch talks for an action plan as well as for a political declaration between the two sides. According to the visiting Director-General, External Relations of the European Commission, Eneko Landabru, a strategic partnership is the highest form of relations that the EU has with any other country.

The Hindu, 30 October 2004

India supports early transition to democracy in Myanmar (Amit Baruah)

New Delhi, Oct.29. India has "noted" the resolve of Myanmar's military leaders to build an "enduring democratic system" in Myanmar and expressed support for national reconciliation and early transition to democracy in that country. "The Indian side stressed that it wished to see a stable, peaceful, prosperous and democratic Myanmar and was ready to assist the Government and the people of Myanmar on their path to further political and economic progress," a joint statement issued at the end of a five-day visit to India by the Myanmar Senior General, Than Shwe, said today. Making it clear that the visit by the Senior-General was not a one-off event, the statement said that both sides agreed to regular exchanges of high-level visits in the future. "The Myanmar side reiterated its strong commitment to building a modern, democratic state suited to Myanmar's needs and conditions."

The Hindu, 30 October 2004

Manmohan, Mckinnon discuss India's role in Commonwealth

New Delhi, Oct.29. India's role and contribution to the Commonwealth figured at the meeting between the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the visiting Commonwealth Secretary, Gen. Don Mckinnon, here today. Dr. Singh reaffirmed the importance India attaches to the Commonwealth. Gen. Mckinnon said he intended to launch a series of seminars to operationalise a report prepared by the Commonwealth group under Dr. Singh's chairmanship on Democracy and Development, the External Affairs Ministry spokesman, Navtej Sarna, told reporters here. Responding to presspersons, Gen. Mckinnon said the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf's decision to continue as Army chief and not to delink it from the office of the President was "below expectations" but felt this did not negate other steps taken towards the return of democracy in that country.

The Pioneer, 31 October 2004

Myanmar falls to Naga fears (Navin Upadhyay)

New Delhi. Myanmar may be willing for a Bhutan-type crackdown against North-East insurgent groups stationed in its dense jungles, but India seems to have developed cold feet on the issue following an ultimatum by Naga leaders that they would end the ceasefire and pull out of the on-going peace process if their cadres are targetted in Burma. Sources said, NSCN(K) chairman SS Khaplang has written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, opposing a crackdown in Myanmar. However, well-placed sources in the Home Ministry said that under pressure from NSCN(K) and NSCN(I-M), India has now decided that no Naga group would be targetted. Instead, the focus would be on flushing out non-Naga groups. However, a partial crackdown of this kind seems near impossible as there would be no way to differentiate between Naga cadres and others. A bulk of the NSCN(K) cadres, including Khaplang, operates from Burma. Any joint military operation there would seriously impair the group's arms supply and escape routes.