

Updates 2007 (India)

□ Supreme Court Order for Compulsory Registration of Marriages in All Religions

In a very significant directive to all States and Union Territories, the Supreme Court of India ordered on October 25, 2007, compulsory registration of marriages of couples from all religions throughout the country. As per its earlier order, the Supreme Court directed all States and Union Territories, which have not enacted rules to this effect so far, to frame the necessary rules within a period of three months.

The Supreme Court's latest order was passed by a Bench comprising Justice Arijit Pasayat and Justice P. Sathasivam on a petition filed by a divorcee, named Seema, who sought directions for making registration of marriages obligatory. The Bench categorically stated in its order that marriages should be compulsorily registered "in respect of persons who are citizens of India even if they belonged to various religions."

In its earlier order on February 14, 2006, the Supreme Court had directed that all marriages in the country should be registered irrespective of the faith of the couple who tied the knot. However, in the wake of that order, various States as well as UT Governments reported compliance under Hindu Marriage Act only. In a majority of cases suggesting non-compliance, religious barriers governing the matrimonial custom and its registration emerged as the biggest stumbling block refraining the Governments from uniformly bringing the Court's order into effect. One of the fundamental objectives of the Court's order was to curb the practice of child marriage, still prevalent in several regions.

Subscribing to the view expressed by the National Commission for Women on this issue, the Court stated that compulsory registration of marriages

would be extremely significant as regards a gamut of women-centric issues such as prevention of child marriage and ensuring a minimum age of marriage; prevention of marriages without the consent of parties involved; checking illegal bigamy/polygamy; enabling married women to claim their right to live in the matrimonial home, maintenance and so on.

□ UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi's Address To UNGA On International Day Of Non-Violence

In her landmark address to the 192-member UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) at its annual session in New York on October 2, 2007, UPA Chairperson and Congress President Ms. Sonia Gandhi spoke of the international community's "collective failure" to move towards comprehensive universal disarmament. She also referred to the "disturbing emergence" of non-state players in the spread of terrorism. The occasion of her address to the UNGA assumed a momentous significance as the United Nations observed "Father of the Nation" Mahatma Gandhi's birthday as the first International Day of Non-violence.



"It is not the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi that is in question today ... it is whether we have the courage to emulate his preachings and what he lived and died for," Ms. Gandhi said in her address. She was heard in rapt attention by leaders from different nations and her son Mr. Rahul Gandhi, External Affairs Minister

Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and his deputy Mr. Anand Sharma.

Ms. Gandhi said the world was facing violence of various kinds and there was a collective failure on the part of the international community in tackling terrorism and checking nuclear proliferation. The United Progressive Alliance Chairperson also had a word of caution for representatives from across the world, asking them not to make the Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary another annual ritual. Fallacies about non-violence abound, Ms. Gandhi said, rejecting the contention by some that it was a sign of weakness or cowardice. "Nothing could be further from the truth," she told sceptics, adding non-violence went far beyond passive resistance or even civil disobedience.

Ms. Gandhi aptly maintained that practising non-violence in its true spirit calls for "strict discipline of mind: the courage to face aggression, the moral conviction to stay the course and the strength to do so without harbouring any malice towards the opponent." She opined that at the heart of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence was his belief that strength came from righteousness, not force; power came from truth, not might; victory came from moral courage, not imposed submission.

Touching upon Mahatma Gandhi's idea that means and ends are inseparable, she said that his time-tested worldview considered means themselves to be mother of the ends. So, he held that unworthy means could never produce worthy ends.

Now, as we take a look at history, both past and contemporary, there is every reason to believe that violence has only begot violence in an unending spiral, fostering hatred and revenge. "Violence seeks to impose and overwhelm, which is why its victories are transitory. Non-violence seeks to engage and persuade, which is why its results are enduring," Ms. Gandhi said amidst cheers. Emphasising that the Mahatma himself was, first and foremost, a man of action,

she said that he was indeed a man of deep contemplation and galvanising energy.

“It is this energy that enabled him to overcome resistance arising from hostility, indifference and cynicism. It is this energy that gave him the resilience to press ahead, in spite of tremendous obstacles and tribulations,” the Congress leader said and recalled the Mahatma’s remark, “We must ourselves become the change we seek”.

If the 20th century was the bloodiest in human history, it was also the century when non-violence saw its greatest triumphs, cutting across the boundaries of continents and faiths. “It is worth remembering that among the myriad civil disobedience movements, the only army of non-violence was the one led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, known to history as ‘the Frontier Gandhi’,” Ms. Gandhi said.

□ **President Launches “Save the Girl Child” Campaign**

Hon’ble President Ms. Pratibha Patil on October 2, 2007, described the declining girl child ratio in the country as a “matter of shame,” and said girls should be treated not as a “curse” but as a “boon.” Launching a “Save the Girl Child” campaign of the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti in New Delhi, Ms. Patil said it was a matter of shame that the disturbed sex ratio was seen not only in the backward States, but also in the progressive society. The President, who was the first signatory of the campaign, said it was a matter of concern that the phenomenon was seen among those educated and having a status in society.

“This disturbing sex ratio was creating a big problem. This could develop into a crime, which would not be good for the stability and security of the society”, she said. Misuse of technology to determine the sex of the foetus and easy access to it had contributed to the rapid decline in the child sex ratio which could adversely impact the delicate balance of nature and destroy the moral and social fabric. The President said the launch of the campaign would have a far reaching

impact on the minds of people.

Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss said he was not only “concerned” at but also felt “ashamed” of the current trend of declining girl child ratio in the country. “We have to reverse the trend. For this we have launched many campaigns. Parliamentarians were allotted Rs. 5 lakh each to create awareness of the subject”, he added.



The President also launched a tuberculosis seal to create awareness and raise funds to fight the disease in New Delhi on October 3, 2007. The attractively designed seal costs Rs. 2. It will be available at all-State TB associations, hospitals, primary health centres and DOTS clinics. It was designed by the Tuberculosis Association of India. Dr. Ramadoss briefed the President on the country’s success in checking the spread of TB and the effectiveness of the programme that was able to save six million lives since its inception.

“Since the launch of the programme in 1998, we have been able to bring down the death rate and seen an increase in the detection rate. The WHO has awarded the programme as the largest public health campaign in the world,” Dr. Ramadoss said.

As part of the celebrations of the 60th Year of Independence, Shahid Bhagat Singh’s birth centenary ‘and the anniversary of the First War of Independence, the President also released a commemorative gold medallion at a separate function at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The medallion is a tribute to the freedom fighters and salutes the undying spirit and emotions of Indians.

□ **58th International Astronautical Congress At Hyderabad**

The 58th International Astronautical Congress (IAC) was inaugurated by the Minister of State in the Prime Minister’s Office, Mr. Prithviraj Chavan at Hyderabad on September 24, 2007. As many as 2,000 delegates, including chiefs of several national space agencies from different countries, took part in the IAC. A series of lunar missions planned by Japan, China, Russia, the US and India and later missions of land rovers and human beings to Mars came sharply into focus at the IAC plenary, when the heads of top national space agencies gathered to answer questions from delegates.

In his opening speech, Mr. Chavan urged the space-faring nations to promote an ethical, legal framework for the use of space and to prevent it from becoming “a future war zone.” He reminded the delegates about the dangers of extending the conflicts on earth into outer space and “turning space into a battlefield of future.” “Our common resolve is essential to prevent such an eventuality”, he said. Recalling the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s message to the second UN Conference on Peaceful Use of Outer Space, he urged scientists and leaders “to see the world in its wholeness, as indeed it is viewed from space, and through their collective wisdom, take practical steps to ensure that our differences are not extended into space.”

Mr. Chavan said that a robust system for the protection of space assets, whether used for military, commercial or societal applications, would be needed to be addressed urgently through appropriate legal, technical and cooperative mechanism. There was also an urgent need to design regulations to minimise the menace of growing debris in outer space. Mr. Chavan said that the Indian Space Programme has planned about 60 missions over the next five years for achieving several new objectives in different fields, including navigation and space transportation.

ISRO Chairman Mr. G. Madhavan Nair said the organisation was entering

the next phase of space vision with components of advanced technologies for low-cost access to space planetary exploration and manned mission initiatives in the next few decades. He said the Government had not yet taken any decision to send an Indian into space.

In their speeches, International Astronautical Federation President Mr. James V. Zimmerman, International Academy of Astronauts' President Mr. Edward C. Stone and International Institute of Space Law (IISL) President Mr. Nandasiri Jasentuliyana highlighted different dimensions of space activities today, the global character of these activities and their numerous implications.

Mr. B. N. Suresh, Chairman, local organising committee, said there were gaps in knowledge in understanding the phenomenon of global change and space scientists should focus on this. He said there was renewed interest in robotics and human exploration of space.

Dr. Michael Griffin, Administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), US, said he was convinced that the first human being would land on Mars in 2037. "When this conference meets in 2057, I am convinced that we will be able to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the first human landing on Mars...", he asserted at the Congress. Dr. Griffin said the next step in space exploration would be one step beyond the International Space Station (ISS), where 15 partners of the US were engaged in building a platform for humanity above the earth's atmosphere.

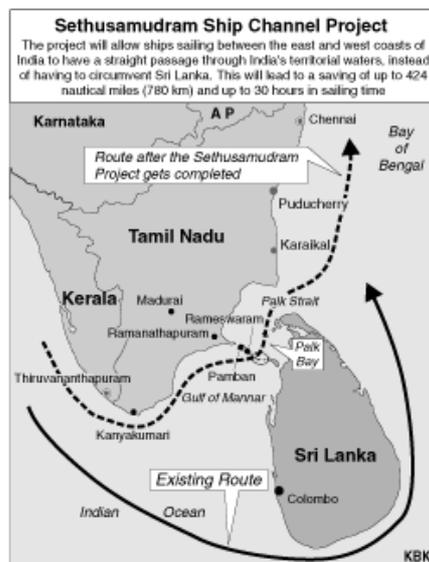
Dr. Sun Laiyan, Administrator of CNSA (China National Space Administration) revealed that his country had planned its missions to the moon in three stages: orbiting, roving and returning. China had no plans to send a man to the moon. But Dr. Laiyan was confident that "hopefully, the objective would be fulfilled later."

Dr. Keiji Tachikawa, President of Japanese Space Exploration Agency, said Japan would send a series of spacecraft to the moon to explore it further. "Our future programme in human space flight," said Mr. Anatoly N. Pernimov,

Head, Federal Space Agency, Russia, "will be in three major steps" starting in 2015 and continuing upto 2040.

□ Sethu Project: Centre To Consider Alternative Alignment

In a major development, the Centre on September 14, 2007 informed the Supreme Court that it would consider executing the Sethusamudram shipping channel project through an alternative alignment so that the 30-km-long Ramar Sethu/Adam's Bridge could be protected from damage. The feasibility of alternative alignments would be considered in three months, Additional Solicitor-General Mr. Gopal Subramaniam told a Bench consisting of Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan and Justice R.V. Raveendran. It was hearing a batch of petitions filed by Janata Party president Mr. Subramanian Swamy and others seeking a direction to protect and declare Ramar Sethu a national monument.



The ASG said, "The Central Government has taken note of the wide-ranging public sentiment, which has been expressed in respect of the decision to proceed with the construction of the Sethusamudram shipping channel. The Central Government has total respect for all religions and Hinduism in particular in the context of the present case."

Mr. Gopal Subramaniam said the Government would review the matter. A mechanism would be set up to consider objections/suggestions from petitioners and others, and a final decision on the alignment would be taken in three months. In view of this, he said, the Centre and the Archaeological Survey of India decided to withdraw the entire counter-affidavits filed on September 10 and 11, 2007 and sought permission to do so. He said, "The Central Government is also keen that its decisions bind and bring society together, rather than cause any disruption in the religious and social psyche of one true India."

Earlier, the Centre had stated in one affidavit that the studies conducted by the Geological Survey of India between December 2002 and 2005 also conclusively established that Adam's Bridge was a natural geological formation comprising compact clay, calcareous sandstone and fossiliferous limestone.

On the plea for an alternative alignment, the Centre had stated that the alignment No. 6, which was the present alignment of the Sethusamudram project, had been validly resorted to after a due consideration of all relevant factors, including ecological factors. None of the other alternatives which are suggested by the petitioner are viable alternatives.

The ASI had submitted that there was no evidence to prove "the existence of the characters or the occurrence of the events" in the *Ramayana*. Later on, the Law Minister Mr. H.R. Bhardwaj announced that the objectionable portions in the ASI affidavit would be withdrawn and a supplementary affidavit filed.

When the matter was taken up, the ASG said, "We have decided to withdraw the two affidavits and placed before the court new submissions." Dr. Subramanian Swamy said certain documents in the government's possession should be made available to him. The ASG replied that whatever documents or material were in its possession would be given on receipt of an application.

Senior counsel Mr. K.K. Venugopal and Mr. M.N. Krishnamani, appearing for petitioners Dandi Swami Sri

Vidyananda Bharati and Amagopalan, said the Government must consider their suggestions. The ASG said it would consider all points of view and take a final decision.

Recording the submissions, the Bench extended till January 2008 the August 31 interim order, which said "the dredging activity may be carried out, but till September 14 the alleged Adam's Bridge/Ramar Sethu shall not be damaged in any manner." It posted the matter for further hearing in the first week of January 2008.

❑ India Joins Select Group To Develop Technology For UCAV

India has joined a select group of countries that have launched programmes to develop technology for an Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle (UCAV). The UCAVs or 'combat drones', which are the latest addition in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are different from the latter as they have specific designs to deliver weapons and attack targets. They have a higher degree of autonomy.

The Indian programme is indeed the result of concerted efforts of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). It will promote the development of know-how for a swept wing, stealth design and composite construction technical demonstrator that will demonstrate "the technical feasibility, military utility and operational value for a networked system of high performance" weaponised UCAVs.

The DRDO's Chief Controller, Research and Development (Aeronautics and Material Sciences), Mr. D. Banerjee said that with "stealth obviously be an important issue" the fuselage would have to carry internally housed weapon bays. Stealth would also need the power plant to be internally mounted and of a non-after burning turbofan engine type. However, specifications for issues like payload, retractable landing gear, endurance and hard points for auxiliary fuel tanks are yet to be finalised. The DRDO has already made arrangements for radar cross simulation (identification of radar reflecting areas) and measurement of radar cross section (the

extent to which an object reflects an incident electromagnetic wave). The nodal agency for the UCAV programme is the Bengaluru-based Defence Research and Development Organisation Laboratory and the Aeronautical Development Establishment. The UCAV will be programmed with route and target details and can conduct the mission virtually autonomously, without human controllers.

The DRDO was looking for a partner from private sector for its Medium Attitude Long Endurance (MALE) Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). It is expected that the DRDO's MALE surveillance UAV will have an endurance of 24 hours and can operate at 35,000 feet. It will also have autonomous take-off and landing, wheeled undercarriage and a single (Rotax) piston engine.

The other global programmes are the French nEWROn, Israel's Eitan, British Taranis, China's Anjian and the US's X-45. These programmes imply that the technology are in various stages of development. The UCAV can be utilised for suppression of enemy air defence, electronic warfare, surveillance, precision strike and associated operations.

❑ New President Of India

Ms. Pratibha Patil was sworn in by Justice K.G. Balakrishnan, Chief Justice of India, on July 25, 2007, as the first woman President and in all, the 12th President of the Republic of India. Earlier, on July 22, 2007, Ms. Pratibha Patil, the United Progressive Alliance-Left candidate for the Presidential election was declared elected for the post of the President of India. Ms. Patil's victory over her NDA-backed rival and outgoing Vice-President Mr. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat capped a long and bitter contest hitherto unprecedented in the annals of Indian history.

Born on December 19, 1934 in

Nadgaon (Jalgaon district, Maharashtra), Ms. Patil is also the first Maharashtrian to hold the country's most august office. Throughout her long and successful career, she has held a number of important designations. A trained lawyer, she represented Edlabad constituency in Jalgaon district as a Member of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly from 1962 to 1985. Ms. Patil was a Member of Parliament from Amravati Lok Sabha constituency for five years (1991 - 1996). She was Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha for two years (November 1986 - November 1988). She was also the first woman Governor of Rajasthan from 2004 to 2007.

❑ New Vice-President Of India

Former diplomat Mohammad Hamid Ansari was administered the oath of office by Hon'ble President Ms. Pratibha Patil at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on August 11, 2007. He took charge as Rajya Sabha Chairman on August 13, 2007. Earlier, he was declared elected on August 10, 2007, as the country's 12th Vice-President. In a triangular contest in which Mr. Ansari was pitted against the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) nominee, Ms. Najma Heptulla and the United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA) candidate, Mr. Rasheed Masood, he emerged winner securing 455 out of the 762 votes polled.

Born in Kolkata on April 1, 1937, Mr. Ansari is the grand nephew of freedom fighter and former Congress President (1927) Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari. Starting his career as a civil servant in the Indian Foreign Service in 1961, he held prestigious posts such as the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, High Commissioner to Australia and Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. He also served as the Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University from May 2000 to March 2002 and then, as the Chairman of India's National Commission for Minorities (NCM). He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1984.



❑ Supreme Court Refuses To Vacate OBC Quota Stay

The Centre's bid to get the OBC reservation implemented in educational institutions from the current academic year suffered a serious jolt on August 8, 2007, when the Supreme Court refused to grant a relief to the Government in this regard. The Court categorically stated that the Government had failed to do the necessary groundwork for getting prior approval from competent authorities to increase the number of seats with a view to accommodating quota students. It was noted by the Apex Court that the implementation of the quota in medical colleges, dental colleges and engineering institutions was out of question this year since the Centre did not seek the mandatory prior approval of the Medical Council of India, Dental Council of India and All-India Council for Technical Education.

The Bench comprising Justices Arijit Pasayat, C.K. Thakker, R.V. Raveendran and Dalveer Bhandari, said if the medical, dental and engineering colleges were to be kept out, there was no question of implementing the quota in other institutions where such approval had even been obtained.

❑ Indo-US Nuclear Deal Gets Cabinet Approval

The Indo-US civilian nuclear agreement has been approved by the Union Cabinet. Following a high-level meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security and Political Affairs, External Affairs Minister Mr. Pranab Mukherjee said that all the requirements from the Indian side have been met. Mutual consensus on the final manuscript of the deal was arrived at during a meeting in Washington between Foreign Secretary Mr. Shivshankar Menon and US Deputy Secretary of State Mr. Nicholas Burns. The meeting was attended by National Security Adviser Mr. M.K. Narayanan and Nuclear Energy Commission Chairman Mr. Anil Kakodkar.

The final approval was granted in a cabinet committee meeting on nuclear security presided over by Prime Minister

Dr. Manmohan Singh on July 25, 2007. Earlier, the draft of the deal was prepared during the four-day secretarial level talks between the two countries. Subsequently, on July 27, 2007, India and America declared the civilian nuclear deal recognized. Indian authorities have proclaimed that its indigenous nuclear programme is quite safe.

❑ Eighth World Hindi Conference

The three-day eighth World Hindi Conference came to an end at the UN headquarters in New York on July 15, 2007, with an appeal to India to make a concerted effort to mobilise other nations towards giving recognition to Hindi as the seventh official language of the United Nations. The six UN languages are English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Arabic. The conference also appealed to expatriate Indians to pressurise their respective governments to support this move.



The conference had nine thematic sessions at which scholars from India and abroad, including scholars from non-Hindi speaking regions, presented papers on subjects ranging from Hindi and IT to the role of Bollywood in the promotion of Hindi. Eminent figures of Hindi literature and authors in different related dialects also attended the event. The concluding session saw 14 significant proposals being put forward with a view to promoting the use of Hindi globally and making it popular through broad-based efforts at different levels.

Earlier, United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon drew wide applause when he inaugurated the Eighth World Hindi Conference on July

13, 2007, with a sprinkling of Hindi. “*Is sammelan mein bhag lete hue mujhe bahut khushi ho rahi hai, aur mai sab ko shubhkamnayen deta hun* (I am very happy to participate in the conference, and convey my best wishes to all participants)”, said Mr. Moon at the end of his speech.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh expressed the hope through his message about Hindi getting the attention it deserved in the United States. Addressing the gathering through video-conference from New Delhi, Dr. Singh said it was important to improve the language's compatibility with the Internet.

❑ Red Fort Of Delhi On World Heritage List

Delhi's Red Fort, a majestic fort built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan has found a place in UNESCO's World Heritage List. The decision to include the Red Fort on the list was taken on June 28, 2007, in New Zealand by the World Heritage Committee. This puts the National Capital at par with Agra, each with three World Heritage Sites now.

Built in the 17th century, the Red Fort has much more to offer than the influence of Shah Jahan's obsession with perfection. With its own special place in modern Indian history, the Red Fort is a collage of different periods from the Mughal to the British. The World Heritage Committee also inscribed three other cultural sites – the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine and its Cultural Landscape in Japan, the Parthian Fortresses of Nisa in Turkmenistan, and the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

❑ BrahMos Handed Over To The Army

Inaugurating a function at the BrahMos Aerospace Complex, which marked the handing over of a replica of the Mobile Autonomous Launcher (MAL) of the missile to the Indian Army, the then President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam said in New Delhi on June 21, 2007, that the time has come for

BrahMos Aerospace Limited to work on the Mark-II version of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile so that we could still be the market leader in hypersonic cruise missiles. In the emerging network-centric warfare scenario, the fast deployment of hypersonic missile systems will be necessary to maintain our force-level supremacy, he said. BrahMos is a product of India-Russia cooperation.



Dr. Kalam congratulated Dr. A. Sivathanu Pillai, CEO and Managing Director, BrahMos Aerospace, and Dr. Herbert A. Yefremov, Director-General, NPO Mashinostroyeniya (NPO-M), Russia, and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on realising the missile project. The NPO-M is the Russian partner of the joint venture.

BrahMos can fly at a velocity of 1 km a second and its range is 290 km. It can carry conventional warheads weighing 300 kg, and is nine metres long and has two stages.

❑ Kamat Is New Goa CM

Mr. Digambar V. Kamat was sworn in as the 19th Chief Minister of Goa on June 8, 2007. He was proposed as a consensus candidate for the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leadership by the Pradesh Congress Committee President Mr. Ravi Naik and outgoing Chief Minister Mr. Pratapsinh Rane after the former failed to muster support from some crucial allies. Mr. Kamat, who joined the Congress after playing a key role in toppling the BJP Government in 2005, was administered the oath of office and

secrecy by the State Governor, Mr. S.C. Jamir at the Raj Bhavan.

Earlier, in the Goa Assembly elections, the Congress-NCP (National Congress Party) alliance emerged as the largest combination by winning 19 seats in the 40-member Legislative Assembly of the State. As per the results announced on June 5, 2007 in Panaji, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) bagged 14 seats. Among other political parties, the Save Goa Front (SGF) and the Maharashtra-wadi Gomantak Party (MGP) won two seats each while the United Goans Democratic Party (UGDP) got one seat.

❑ Mayawati Sworn In As The New Uttar Pradesh CM

BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) Chief Ms. Mayawati was sworn in on May 13, 2007, as the 32nd Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. She was administered the oath of office and secrecy by the State Governor Mr. T.V. Rajeswar at the Raj Bhawan in Lucknow. Along with Ms. Mayawati, who became the Chief Minister of the country's most populous State for the fourth time, a 49-member Ministry led by her including 19 Cabinet rank Ministers also took oath and assumed office.

Earlier, results of the Assembly elections in UP were announced on May 11, 2007. By registering victory in 206 out of 403 Assembly constituencies for which the elections were held, BSP led by Ms. Mayawati emerged as the largest party, while the Samajwadi Party (SP), led by the outgoing Chief Minister Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, ended up with 97 seats only. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress managed to secure 51 and 22 seats, respectively while other parties and independents together had 27 seats in their kitty.

❑ World's Biggest Aircraft Lands In India

The world's biggest passenger aircraft – Airbus A380 – that can seat up to 850 passengers cruised through

Indian skies and landed in New Delhi for the first time on May 6, 2007. The A380, the world's first double-deck passenger aircraft, landed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport at Runway 10. The aircraft, which reached Delhi as part of world tour, was parked at the terminal near the Air Traffic Control (ATC) building. During its India visit, it took some VIPs on a flight over Delhi and on May 8, 2007 it took off for Mumbai. The 80-foot tall giant aircraft flew off from Mumbai on May 9, 2007.

The four-engined airliner, which has been manufactured by the European Aeronautic Defence & Space Co. has a wingspan of about 262 feet (79.8 m), a length of 239 feet (73 m) and a maximum take-off weight of more than 5,40,000 kg (1.2 million pounds), is 'almost as big as a football field'. In India, private airline Kingfisher is the only carrier that has a firm order for five A380 aircrafts. Kingfisher is due to take delivery of the aircraft in 2011-12.

A380 can land and takeoff on any runway that can accommodate a Boeing 747, but airports will have to do some modifications for its weight and wingspan. Incidentally, only three airports in India – Delhi, Mumbai and Kochi – can accommodate the aircraft.

❑ 14th SAARC Summit

The 14th Summit of the leaders of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation was held on April 3-4, 2007 in New Delhi. Apart from Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, the other leaders of the member nations of the regional grouping who attended the summit included the Sri Lanka President Dr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, Bangladesh interim Government's Chief Adviser Mr. Fakhruddin Ahmad, Maldives President Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, Nepal Prime Minister Mr. Girija Prasad Koirala, Pakistan Prime Minister Mr. Shaukat Aziz, Bhutan Prime Minister Mr. Lyonpo Khando Wangchuk and Afghanistan President Mr. Hamid Karzai. Earlier, Afghanistan formally joined SAARC as the 8th member of the regional grouping.

Terrorism, trade and transit were the three major issues at the landmark summit of an expanded SAARC. The summit underscored a larger global interest in the region with the United States, the European Union, China, Japan and South Korea participating as observers for the first time in the 22-year-old history of the regional grouping. The focus of the opening session of the summit was on making the SAARC a more efficient organisation and implementing crucial regional projects that have been long under discussion. SAARC leaders discussed the contours of a South-Asian University to be set up in India. An inter-govern-mental agreement was signed to this effect and the details in that regard were worked out.

Other important intra-regional projects that were discussed included the institution of a SAARC Development Fund, a Regional Telemedicine Network and a Regional Food Bank. India pressed for more intra-regional cooperation in combating the common scourge of terrorism in the region. India's concern about terrorism in the region is directly linked to its broader agenda of promoting greater connectivity and free trade in the region.

❑ **Cauvery Tribunal Gives Final Award**

The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal gave its much awaited final award on February 5, 2007 setting out the share of waters of the Cauvery among the riparian States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala, and the Union Territory of Puducherry. The proceedings over the politically sensitive issue went on for more than 16 years. The Tribunal, comprising Chairman Justice Mr. N.P. Singh and members Mr. N.S. Rao and Mr. Sudhir Narain, in a unanimous award determined the total availability of water in the Cauvery basin at 740 thousand million cubic feet (tmcft) at the Lower Coleroon Anicut site on the basis of 50 percent dependability.

In a balancing act it apportioned the total as follows: for Tamil Nadu, 419 tmcft (as against the demand of 562 tmcft); Karnataka 270 tmcft (as against

its demand of 465 tmcft); Kerala 30 tmcft and Puducherry 7 tmcft. The quantum reserved for environmental protection is 10 tmcft, and that determined for inevitable "escapages" into the sea is 4 tmcft.

❑ **International Centennial Conference On Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha**

A two-day international conference was held at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi on January 29-30, 2007, to mark the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi's timeless principle of *Satyagraha*. The conference, organised by the AICC (All India Congress Committee) registered the participation of political leaders, diplomats, thinkers, intellectuals, farmers and social activists from over 90 countries.

In the opening session UPA Chairperson and President of the Congress Party Ms. Sonia Gandhi and 'Father of the Nation' Mahatma Gandhi's granddaughter Ms. Ila Gandhi, besides foreign dignitaries including the former Zambian President Mr. Kenneth Kaunda, former President of Poland and Nobel laureate Mr. Lech Walesa, President of Maldives Mr. Momoon Abdul Ghayoom and 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner Mr. Muhammad Yunus addressed the conference. Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa was another notable international personality who spoke during the conference.

At the end of the conference, around 400 delegates from 90 nations and 122 organisations signed the landmark "Satyagraha Centenary Declaration", showing a global unanimity on the relevance of Mahatma's ideals in poverty, hunger and disease – and to pave the way for peace and harmony. The delegates appealed to the United Nations to declare October 2, the Mahatma's birthday, as the International Non-violence Day.

❑ **Landmark Visit Of Russian President Vladimir Putin**

On a landmark visit aimed at consolidating the bedrock of Indo-

Russian cooperation, President Vladimir Putin of Russia reached New Delhi on January 25, 2007. After bilateral talks between Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin, the two sides agreed to take their relations to "new heights" in all other areas particularly defence, trade, space and science and technology. Later, Mr. Putin shared with the then President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh the majestic podium at the India Gate as the Chief Guest during the 57th Republic Day celebrations held in New Delhi on January 26, 2007.



Two joint statements were issued and eight accords signed by the two sides, including one on cooperation on sharing of data from Russia's Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS) and jointly launch a 'YOUTHSAT'. They hope to restore this system through joint efforts and organise its transition to new GLONASS-M and GLONASS-K space devices. Russia intends to increase (with the participation of India) the grouping of GLONASS system to 18 satellites in 2007. The launch of these satellites will be on board on both Russian and Indian space boosters.

Areas in which the Russian side showed deep interest in co-operating include telecommuni-cations, shipbuilding, and high technology including outer space. In the field of space, both the countries have agreed to jointly develop and exploit the Russian global navigation satellite system, GLONASS.

Justice Balakrishnan Becomes 37th Chief Justice Of India

Justice K.G. Balakrishnan (62), the seniormost judge of the Supreme Court, took over as the 37th Chief Justice of India on January 14, 2007. He succeeded Justice Y.K. Sabharwal who retired on January 13, 2007. Earlier, the formal notification on the appointment was issued on December 26, 2006. With his appointment to the topmost office of Indian Judiciary, he has become the first Chief Justice of India belonging to the Scheduled Caste. He will have a tenure till May 2010.

At the beginning of his legal career in 1968 as an advocate, Justice Balakrishnan pleaded both criminal and civil cases in the Ernakulam court. He was appointed munsif in the Kerala Judicial Services in 1973. He later resigned and resumed practice in the Kerala High Court. In 1985, he was appointed judge of the Kerala High Court, and in 1997 was transferred to the Gujarat High Court. He became Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court in 1998, and in 1999, he assumed charge as the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court. On June 8, 2000, he was elevated to the Supreme Court.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2007

The Fifth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas ended with the conferment of the Pravasi Samman Awards to some outstanding people of Indian origin associated with different fields, by the then President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi on January 9, 2007. In all, 15 distinguished personalities received the awards for their stellar contributions to various fields.

Earlier, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh along with Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs Mr. Vayalar Ravi, Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore Mr. S. Jayakumar and Delhi Chief Minister Ms. Sheila Dikshit lit the lamp to mark the inauguration of the fifth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in New Delhi on January 7, 2007. Speaking at the annual congregation of the Indian diaspora, Dr. Singh said India was happy that the US had adopted a legislation which would enable it to cooperate in the field of civil nuclear energy. Calling the US law on civil nuclear energy an important step forward in bilateral ties, he thanked the Indian-American community for their significant role in

highlighting the importance of this initiative in the United States and elsewhere.



The awardees included Gopal Raju (USA); Lord Diljit Rana, MBE and member of the House of Lords (UK); Dave Sukhdip Singh Hayer (Canada); Dr. M. Anirudhan (USA); Billy Nair (South Africa); Pheroze Nowrojee (Kenya); Nirmal K. Sinha (USA); Dr. K.R. Somasundram (Malaysia); Kenneth Benjamin (Jamaica); Sibabrata Roy (Germany); Syed M. Salahuddin (UAE); Dr. B.R. Shetty (Abu Dhabi); Moti Tikaram (Fiji); Abdul Magid Abdool Karim Vakil (Portugal); and Dr. P. Jayaraman (USA).

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