

# Updates 2007 (The World)

## ❑ **Kirchner – Argentina’s First Elected Woman President**

In a rare power handover between spouses, Ms. Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, the wife of the outgoing Argentina President Mr. Nestor Kirchner and a centre-left senator, became the



*Ms. C. F. Kirchner*

country's first popularly elected woman President in Buenos Aires (Argentina) on October 28, 2007. According to experts, her win was primarily based on the economic boom and the popularity of her husband.

Ms. Kirchner, a three-term senator, captured 45 percent of the vote, outpacing another woman runner-up, independent candidate Ms. Elisa Carrio, by more than 22 percentage points. In her victory speech, she defended President Mr. Nestor Kirchner's controversial handling of inflation and the nation's consumer price index. She promised to put a priority on creating jobs, boosting exports and bettering health care and education.

## ❑ **North Korea Agrees To Disable Main Reactor**

North Korea has agreed to declare all its nuclear programmes and disable its main atomic reactor by the end of 2007 under the US supervision, according to a six-nation agreement released on October 3, 2007. The deal – the second phase of a long-running process aimed at ending Pyongyang's atomic weapons drive – was immediately welcomed by the US President, Mr. George W. Bush, as well as by Japan and South Korea.

North Korea “agreed to disable all its existing nuclear facilities” as the next step in a landmark agreement

reached by the six parties in February, 2007, according to a copy of the agreement text released by China, host of the talks. The four-day discussions ended in Beijing on September 30, 2007. As part of the second phase, North Korea will disable its 5-MW plutonium producing reactor and two other key facilities at Yongbyon by December 31, 2007.

The facilities were described by Mr. Bush as the “core” of North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, according to a US government statement released in Washington.

Earlier, Washington had accused North Korea of running a secret programme to develop highly enriched uranium. It is worth mentioning in this regard that highly enriched uranium and plutonium could be used to make nuclear weapons. However, there was no mention of uranium in the statement.

In return for pushing ahead with disarmament, the five other parties to the talks would provide North Korea with another 9,00,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil or its equivalent in aid, the pact said. Pyongyang received 1,00,000 tonnes of fuel from South Korea and China after it shut down Yongbyon, and allowed inspectors from the UN atomic watchdog back into the country.

The statement said the US agreed to work to improve bilateral relations with North Korea, “moving towards a full diplomatic relationship.”

Washington also committed itself to working towards removing Pyongyang from its list of state sponsors of terrorism but only if the country continued pushing ahead with disarmament. The talks, which began in 2003, failed to stop North Korea from testing an atomic bomb in October, 2006.

Envoys from six nations struck an agreement on the next phase of ending North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, which the United States hailed as comprehensive and detailed.

“The joint statement was very comprehensive,” the US negotiator, Mr. Christopher Hill told media-persons referring to the agreement outlined by China, which hosted the talks. “China put together a very nice joint statement. There are lots of details. It is very useful,” Mr. Hill added.

One key feature of the statement was a reference to disabling North Korea's main nuclear facility at Yongbyon and two other sites by the end of 2007. They were simply shut down in July 2007, but disablement is regarded as a major step further because once that is done, the North Korea would require months to get them operational again in order to resume any weapons programme.

## ❑ **South Korea And North Korea Reach Historic Accord**

Crossing “the forbidden line” in a quest for peace and reconciliation, South Korean President Mr. Roh Moo-hyun on October 2, 2007, walked into North Korea from across the nominally demilitarised zone that has kept the two ethnic neighbours apart for over 50 years.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Roh was unexpectedly greeted by his potential summit partner and North Korean leader Mr. Kim Jong-il. Mr. Kim had earlier deputed North Korea's titular Head of State Mr. Kim Yong-nam to receive the visiting dignitary on his arrival.

The first-ever inter-Korean summit took place in Pyongyang just over seven years ago. Known as the summit of two Kims under the “sunshine policy” of the then South Korean leader, Mr. Kim Dae-jung, that meeting had broken the cast-iron mould of the Cold War-era hostilities between the two sides.

During their summit talks on October 4, 2007, the two leaders pledged to seek help from China and the United States in formally declaring the 1950-53

Korean War over at the earliest. Categorically reaffirming their resolve to adopt the policy of non-aggression against each other, Mr. Kim and Mr. Roh also called for the resumption of regular freight train services between the two countries. They also agreed to send a joint cheering squad to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games by train besides operating direct tour flights between Seoul and Mount Paektu on the North Korean border with China.

The two leaders, in their joint statement, said that North Korea and South Korea would hold a meeting of defence ministers in November, 2007 to discuss ways to prevent armed clashes. Also, the Prime Ministers from the two sides would meet in Seoul to discuss the implementation of the agreement. As per the historic accord, leaders of the two states will meet frequently. Moreover, the North and South will establish a special district in the North Korean west-coast port city of Haeju and set up a regular maritime transport service with the South and a joint fishing ground. The two states will repair the highway joining the North Korean capital and Kaesong and refurbish a railway line on the North's border with China.

#### ■ Seasoned Fukuda Takes Over As Japan's Premier

Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, the President of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, was appointed the 91st Prime Minister of the country on September 25, 2007, succeeding Mr. Shinzo Abe who resigned earlier. Mr. Fukuda retained his predecessor's Finance and Economy Ministers, leaving analysts cautious about prospects for further free-market reforms.

Mr. Fukuda, who has vowed to continue economic reform while easing the pain of rural areas, retained Finance Minister Fukushiro Nukaga and Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Hiroko Ota along with Akira Amari, the Trade Minister. Both have pledged to stay true to free-market reforms, but many analysts doubt whether the new government has the appetite to push through painful public spending cuts

after a recent Upper House election defeat.



The Opposition, which seized one House of Parliament in July 2007 elections, argues that reforms initiated under Mr. Abe's predecessor, Mr. Junichiro Koizumi, have hurt the social safety net and regional economies.

Mr. Koizumi set out to slash public works spending and break up the post office with its \$3 trillion in assets, which were used to bankroll often wasteful but politically popular public works.

Following the resignation of Mr. Abe, Mr. Fukuda and Mr. Taro Aso were the two Liberal Democratic Party leaders who contested in the election for the Prime Minister's post, held on September 23, 2007. In the election, Mr. Fukuda received 338 votes, about 100 more than necessary for a majority in the House of Representatives whereas Mr. Aso could get 197 votes only. Although Mr. Fukuda could not have a majority of votes in the House of Councillors (Upper House), the result went in his favour by Article 67 of the Constitution of Japan.

#### ■ Arctic Ice Melts To Its Lowest Level Ever

According to the US scientists, the sea ice of the Arctic shrank to its lowest-ever level in September 2007, shattering the previous record, set two years ago, by an enormous amount.

In what could be seen as one of the most alarming signs yet of accelerating global warming, the summer melt-back exceeded the September 2005 low point by 22 percent in an area of 1.2 million square kilometres in more than 3,85,000

square miles. This represented an area five times the size of the UK. The colossal shrinkage is immediately and dramatically visible on satellite images of the two low points. Furthermore, the difference between 2005 and 2007 is more than double the difference between 2005 and 2002, the previous lowest year.

"It's the biggest drop from a previous record that we've ever had and it's really quite astounding," said Mr. Walt Meier, a research scientist at the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) in Colorado. "That's a dramatic change in one year. Certainly we've been on a downward trend for the last 30 years or so, but this is really accelerating the trend," he added.

The ice cover of the Arctic Ocean shrinks in the summer and regrows in the autumn and winter, in a regular cycle. By September 16, 2007, it had shrunk to 1.6 million sq. miles, the NSIDC said. This compares with the 2005 low point of 2.07 million sq. miles. The contrast is even greater with the long-term average over the past 20 years or so. Between 1979 (when regular satellite monitoring had just started) and 2000, the long-term average minimum was 2.6 million sq. miles.

The remarkable increase in the rate of melting in the past two or three years has led to a revision of estimates of when the Arctic might be wholly ice free in summer. Early predictions by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), based on computer models of global warming, suggested that as climate change advances, this might happen by 2080. But now scientists are increasingly thinking the models have seriously underestimated the rate, and it may happen much earlier.

According to Mr. Mark Serreze, another senior NSIDC researcher, it might take only 25 years or less. "If we were talking even two or three years ago, I'd have said the transition to an ice-free Arctic summer might be between 2070 and 2100," he said. "But we're starting to see that is rather optimistic, and an educated guess right now would be 2030. It's something that could be within our lifetime. We're on

a strong spiral of decline; some would say a death spiral. I wouldn't go that far but we're certainly on a fast track. We know there is a natural variability, but the magnitude of change is too great to be caused by natural variability alone," he added.

What the melting of the Arctic ice will do is spell doom for much of the wildlife of the region, led by polar bears, which need the ice to hunt seals. Polar bears were officially notified as a threatened species in 2006 by being included in the Red List of the World Conservation Union.

#### ❑ **Russia Tests 'Father Of All Bombs'**

Russia has tested the "Father of all bombs," a conventional air-delivered explosive that experts say can only be compared with a nuclear weapon in terms of its destructive power. The device is a fuel-air explosive, commonly known as a vacuum bomb, that spreads a high incendiary vapour cloud over a wide area and then ignites it, creating an ultra-sonic shock wave and searing fireball that destroys everything in its wake.

A Russian state TV showed the test site, which "looked like a lunar landscape", including the shattered remains of a town, following the blast at an undisclosed location recently. "The results of tests of the aviation explosive device have shown that it is comparable with nuclear weapons in its efficiency and potential," according to Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff Mr. Alexander Rukshin. "But", he added, "it is environment friendly, compared to a nuclear bomb, and it will enable us to ensure national security and at the same time stand up to international terrorism in any part of the globe and in any situation."

In 2003, the US tested a vacuum device, officially called the Massive Ordnance Air Blast Weapon, which was quickly dubbed the "Mother of All Bombs" by American commentators. Russian experts are referring to the allegedly mightier Russian incarnation as the "Father" – the Russians claim their new weapon is much smaller than the US vacuum bomb, but four times more powerful.

#### ❑ **Bush And Hu Reaffirm Their Commitment To Strengthening Bilateral Ties**

The US President Mr. George W. Bush and the Chinese President Mr. Hu Jintao in a face-to-face meeting on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Sydney on September 6, 2007, discussed issues ranging from climate change and Iran to recall of China-made food and products and individual freedom in China. Both the leaders affirmed their strong commitment to build relations of bilateral cooperation between their countries. Each emphasised on the significance of the multidimensional facts of these ties. Mr. Hu said he was committed to further advance our constructive and cooperative relations.



Describing the meeting as a constructive and cordial conversation, Mr. Bush said that he was very comfortable in his discussions with President Mr. Hu. He said that they exchanged ideas on a lot of interests that they wanted to work together on. He cited in particular their desire to work together on climate change.

The Chinese President called the discussion "candid and friendly". As a response to Mr. Bush's enthusiasm about climate change, he said that the issue of climate change born on the welfare of whole humanity and the sustainable development of the whole world. He suggested that the solution to the problem was in development of an appropriate mechanism through stronger international cooperation.

Mr. Hu further added that the United Nations Framework should remain the main channel for the

international efforts to address climate change. Mr. Bush also said that Iran, North Korea, Sudan, the US-China economic and trade ties and currency and exchange rates in that bilateral context were discussed with Mr. Hu.

Mr. Bush said that he shared with Mr. Hu the concerns of the US about religious freedom and religious liberty in China. He also pointed out the recent debate about the defective China-made products and food subject to recalls. "Mr. Hu was quite articulate about product safety and I appreciated his comments", said Mr. Bush.

Mr. Bush also expressed his enthusiasm about accepting Mr. Hu's invitation to attend the 2008 Olympics in China. However, no public comment was made about China's military profile and its recent anti-satellite test.

Noting that the bilateral meeting was candid, friendly, sincere and cordial, Mr. Hu said, "We both expressed a desire to work for the growth of business and commercial sides" of the equation through dialogue and consultations. He appreciated "the consistent US position of opposing any changes to the status quo in the situation across the Taiwan Straits."

#### ❑ **SCO Meets In Bishkek**

A regular meeting of the Council of Heads of Members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was held on August 16, 2007 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The meeting was attended by Mr. Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Kurmanbek Bakiev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan and Mr. Islam Karimov, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Mr. Nurgaliev Bolat Kabdylkhamitovich, Secretary-General of the SCO and Mr. Myrzakan Subanov, Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATS) participated in the meeting.



The heads of the SCO states signed the Treaty following consensus over the terms of the agreement at the commemorative summit of the Council of SCO Heads of State held in Shanghai on June 15, 2006. It aimed to develop long-term friendship and cooperation. They signed the Bishkek Declaration and adopted the Action Plan of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which sought to ensure International Information Security for the implementation of the Statement of Heads of SCO Member States on International Information Security of June 15, 2006. Representatives of the SCO members also signed the Agreement on Inter-governmental Cultural Cooperation among Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States.

They also reviewed the progress made by the SCO since the previous meeting of the Council of Heads of State, reached agreement on future steps to promote all-round cooperation within the SCO framework, and had an in-depth exchange of views on the current international and regional situation. It was felt that there is a growing need for closer cooperation among parliaments and supreme courts of the member states and for information sharing in the legislative field to improve the legal systems of the SCO members.

The heads of state accepted the invitation of President Mr. Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation to observe the Peace Mission 2007, joint counter-terrorism military exercise. The armed forces of the SCO countries conducted on August 17, 2007. In fact, this was the largest military exercise with China and other Central Asian states in Russia's Ural Mountains. The meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO Members for 2009 will be held in

Yekaterinburg, the Russian Federation.

India is a dialogue partner of the SCO. Mr. Deora represented India at the summit.

#### □ **Historic Initiatives To End West Asia Crisis**

Giving a new positive turn to the ongoing efforts for restoring peace in the troubled West Asia region and finding an enduring solution to the issue of the creation of Palestinian state, Israeli Prime Minister Mr. Ehud Olmert paid a historic visit to the West Bank town of Jericho and met President Mr. Mahmoud Abbas on August 6, 2007. Mr. Olmert's visit was the first by a top Israeli leader to a Palestinian town since the outbreak of fighting between Israel and Palestine in 2000.



Earlier, a delegation from the Arab League made a historic visit to Israel on July 25, 2007, to present its own Middle East peace initiative. The foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan, the first delegation comprising 22 members sent to the Jewish state, formally presented the Arab League's proposal for peace between Israel and Palestine in Jerusalem. The proposal, originally presented in 2002 and rejected by the Jewish state, extends an offer from all Arab countries to recognize Israel in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal from land captured in the 1967 Middle East War.

Currently, Egypt and Jordan are the only two nations in the League that recognise Israel. The Arab body refused to recognise Israel after the creation of the Jewish state in 1948 and suspended Egypt in 1979 for a decade when it became the first Arab state to make peace. The Arab League endorsed the plan again in March 2007 over concerns about Iran's growing influence. Arab

League's initiative offers Israel's normal ties with all Arab states in return for a full Israeli withdrawal from territory it occupied in 1967, the creation of a Palestinian state and a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem.

#### □ **Hong Kong Marks First Decade Under Chinese Rule**



Chinese President Mr. Hu Jintao reminded the territory of Hong Kong that the motherland comes first, as the city embarked upon its second decade under Beijing's rule on July 1, 2007. "One country is a pre-requisite of two systems," he said at a ceremony to swear in Hong Kong Chief Executive Mr. Donald Tsang and his cabinet for a new five-year term. "One country means that one must uphold the power vested with the central government and China's sovereignty, unity and security."

People's Liberation Army parachutists performed stunt jumps, and took out a grand parade. At midnight, Chinese officials attended a Buddhist bell-chiming ceremony along with chanting monks to mark the countdown to midnight, the moment Britain had handed back Hong Kong after 156 years as a colony, and to bestow peace and prosperity on the territory. At the same time, across Victoria Harbour, pro-democracy lawmakers gave a stinging rebuke to China's rule on the balcony of the city's historic legislature.

#### □ **Brown Is UK's New Prime Minister**

Mr. Gordon Brown of the ruling Labour Party became on June 27, 2007,

the 52nd Prime Minister of UK and 11th Prime Minister of the Queen's reign, succeeding Mr. Tony Blair as per an announcement made by the latter earlier. Outgoing Prime Minister Mr. Tony Blair, the longest-serving Prime Minister of Labour Party in modern history, also resigned his Parliamentary seat. It brought to an end a political career that spanned nearly a quarter of a century but was eventually marred by his decision to partner with the US President Mr. George W. Bush in the much talked-about invasion of Iraq in 2003.

After being handed over the keys of 10 Downing Street, the new British Prime Minister Mr. Gordon Brown, who served as the Chancellor of Exchequer in Mr. Blair's Government since 1997, remarked, "Let the work of change begin." He said his priorities were education, health and restoring trust in politics and promised to "try my utmost". Mr. Brown promised to lead a government of "all the talents" and said his "mission" was to provide "the best of chances for everyone".



Earlier, Mr. Blair was given an emotional standing ovation by the MPs. He admitted he had "never pretended to be a great House of Commons man" but he paid tribute to the "noble" work of the MPs and – in his final words to Parliament – said : "I wish everyone, friend or foe, well and that is that, the end." As per an announcement made by the "quartet" of the UN, America, EU and Russia, Mr. Blair has been assigned a new job as a peace envoy in the Middle East.

#### ■ Peres Elected Israeli President

Veteran statesman and Nobel laureate Mr. Shimon Peres was elected

President of Israel on June 13, 2007, capping a six-decade old political career in which he has held every senior political position. Mr. Peres has been elected ninth President of Israel at a time when the office of the ceremonial head has taken a severe battering in view of charges of rape and sexual misconduct against the outgoing President, Mr. Moshe Katzav.

Speaking at the Knesset after the final round of voting, a beaming Mr. Peres thanked the lawmakers who supported him and pledged to "give my all to serve Israel." Mr. Peres said he saw his new role as a unifier of Israel's fractured society. "The President's role is not to deal with politics and partisanship, but to represent what unites us in a strong voice," he said. "A President must represent the people's desire to be a united nation," the elderly statesman emphasised.

Prime Minister Mr. Ehud Olmert paid tribute to his deputy saying that, "Israel has been waiting hopefully for the election of Mr. Peres as President." The 83-year-old Nobel laureate won 86 votes in a second round ballot after his two rivals in the race threw their support to him.

#### ■ Climate Protection Captures Centrestage At The 33rd G8 Summit

Leaders of the member nations of G8, the grouping of world's eight most industrialised countries, assembled for the grouping's 33rd annual summit at Kempinski Grand Hotel in Heilingendamm (Germany) from June 6 to June 8, 2007. "Growth and Responsibility" was the central theme of the G8 Summit and its key focus was the framework conditions for the global economy, involving the largest emerging economies in the system of global responsibility and climate protection issues.

Heads of State and Government of G8 nations who attended the Summit included President Mr. George W. Bush of USA, President Mr. Vladimir Putin of Russia, President Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy of France, Prime Minister Mr. Stephen Harper of Canada, Prime Minister Mr. Romano Prodi of Italy, Prime

Minister Mr. Shinzo Abe of Japan and the then Prime Minister Mr. Tony Blair of UK, apart from Germany's Chancellor Ms. Angela Merkel who hosted and chaired the summit. Mr. Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, President of the European Commission, represented European Union at the Summit. India, Brazil, Mexico, China and South Africa, represented by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, President Mr. Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, President Mr. Felipe Calderon, President Mr. Hu Jintao and President Mr. Thabo Mbeki respectively, attended the summit as G8 + 5 participants.

One of the most significant developments at the summit was the breakthrough on climate protection achieved after the G8 leaders agreed on halving global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050. In a joint statement, they said that this goal would be achieved as part of a UN process involving even the big emerging economies. At the conclusive stage of the Summit on June 8, 2007, the G8 leaders spelt out their strong interest in "a stable, democratic and prosperous Africa." They pledged to lift Africa out of poverty and agreed on a \$60-billion plan to fight diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. However, no timeframe was set for the pledged aid.

The G8 leaders also agreed on a policy agenda to promote a smooth adjustment of global imbalances in the context of sustained robust economic growth. They unanimously recognised the importance of initiatives like cross-border direct investment in shaping the world's economy and resolved to strengthen open and transparent investment regimes. In a joint declaration on non-proliferation, they vowed to restrict the access of countries, including NPT (Non-proliferation Treaty) signatories, to civil nuclear technology. But the declaration made no reference to the nuclear weapons states' treaty obligation to get rid of their arsenals.

#### ■ Nicolas Sarkozy Becomes The New French President

Conservative leader Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy was elected on May 6, 2007, the

next President of France, succeeding the outgoing President Mr. Jacques Chirac. Mr. Sarkozy secured 53 percent votes, beating his Socialist rival, Ms. Segolene Royal, by 6 percentage points. His election marks the culmination of a long political career during which he served in a number of key ministerial capacities. Presently, he is the President of the ruling Conservative party, the UMP.



Born in France, Mr. Sarkozy is the progeny of Hungarian-Greek parents. With his victory in the French Presidential election, he is set to become the sixth President of the current Fifth Republic of France which came into being in 1958 with the election of General Charles de Gaulle by direct universal suffrage. Mr. Sarkozy has been the mayor of the wealthy Parisian suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine and has held some senior Cabinet posts, including those of Finance and the Interior. Approximately 44.5 million voters of France took part in the French Presidential election, which, experts believe, may have some crucial underpinnings not only for France itself but also for the EU's course of action and agenda of expansion.

❑ **Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's Visit To Japan**



Chinese Premier Mr. Wen Jiabao paid a historic three-day State visit to Japan on April 11, 2007. It was the first such visit by a Chinese premier in seven years. The purpose of the visit was to bring about a thaw in the bilateral relations of the two regional neighbours. During his stay in Japan, Mr. Jiabao made one point very clear at the beginning of his speech: "The past, he believes, is less important than the present and the future. When I came to Japan 15 years ago, it was also April and the cherry blossoms were in full bloom."

Past Chinese leaders have visited Japan in different ways. Thirty years ago, Deng Xiaoping rode the Shinkansen bullet train and praised Japan's scientific and technological advances, giving rise to a "Deng mania." In contrast, Mr. Jiang Zemin scolded the country for its historical wrongs and decisively worsened relations. Mr. Wen followed Deng's example. Wherever he went, he emphasized the idea of friendship. Former Japanese Prime Minister Mr. Yasuhiro Nakasone was pleased. "This is the first time a Chinese leader has made such an estimate of Japan," he said.

❑ **French TGV Train's New Speed Record On Rails**

A French TGV ("Train a Grande Vitesse", which means 'high-speed train' in French) train made a new world speed record on April 3, 2007, when it hurtled down a newly-built track in the country's eastern Champagne region at a dizzying speed of 574.8 kmph. The special train, which has been christened V150, is an enhanced version of trains that will run on the Paris-Strasbourg line from June 2007. Prior to achieving the outstanding feat, the train had been preparing for the record run for weeks. A number of journalists and other guests boarded the train on its record run.

Earlier, Engineer Alstom, state railways group SNCF and track operator RFF had teamed up to demonstrate French engineering excellence and boost export prospects for French trains. It merits mentioning that the absolute

speed record for trains was set by a "maglev" train in Japan, at 581 kmph in 2003. However, those trains do not run on rails but glide on a magnetic field. The previous speed record for a train running on rails was 515.3 kmph, set in France in 1990.



The V150 is made up of two normal cars that will run on the eastern TGV track, three double-decker carriages and three sets of motorised wheels. The train can develop over 25,000 horsepower, twice that of a conventional TGV. The record was set between Prey near Metz in the east of France, and Bezannes near Reims. The event run was broadcast live on television in France and neighbouring Germany.

Following the inaugural TGV service between Paris and Lyon in 1981, the TGV network, centred on Paris, has expanded to connect cities across France and in adjacent countries. TGVs link France with Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands through the Thalys network, while the Eurostar network links France and Belgium with the UK.

❑ **Maoists Join The New Interim Government Of Nepal**

In a major boost to the ongoing peace process in Nepal, prominent Maoist leaders of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN(M)) joined the Girija Prasad Koirala-led SPA (Seven Party Alliance) Government on April 1, 2007, thus forming an interim set-up as per a landmark agreement between the SPA and the CPN(M). In keeping with the

agreement, Prime Minister Mr. Girija Prasad Koirala took a fresh oath as the interim government's head and administered the oath of office to 22 Ministers. Earlier, Mr. Koirala resigned from his post and was re-elected unanimously by the interim legislature.



Prior to the swearing-in of Mr. Koirala and the Ministers of the interim Government, a meeting of the top leaders of SPA and CPN(M) was convened in Kathmandu, which unanimously decided to hold the Constituent Assembly elections on June 20, 2007. It decided to make necessary amendments in the interim Constitution to give powers to the interim legislature and abolish the institution of monarchy by a two-third majority. In a joint statement issued after the meeting, it was said that the legislature would immediately go for an overthrow of the monarchy if the King indulged in any secret plot to impede the Constituent Assembly elections.

#### ■ Chinese President's State Visit To Russia

Chinese President Mr. Hu Jintao paid a three-day state visit (March 26-28, 2007) and held talks with his Russian counterpart Mr. Vladimir Putin. At the end of their summit level talks, the two leaders signed a joint statement on ways to further develop the Sino-Russian strategic partnership of cooperation. They also took part in the opening ceremony of the "Year of China in Russia" and a Chinese National Exhibition. Chinese and Russian enterprises signed 21 agreements and contracts worth 4.3 billion US dollars after the opening ceremony of China's

national exhibition. Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Dmitry Medvedev, Chinese Vice Premier Mr. Wu Yi and Russian Economic Development and Trade Minister Mr. German Gref took part in the signing ceremony.

Terming Mr. Hu Jintao's visit to Russia very successful and of "significant importance," Mr. Konstantin Vnukov, Director of the first Asian department at the Russian Foreign Ministry, said, "The 'Year of China in Russia' as well as the 'Year of Russia in China' marked in 2006, are both comprehensive and great events which covered various fields ranging from politics, economy to social and cultural aspects." "Russia has never held such a large-scale event with any other country," said the official.

The four-day exhibition, which started on March 27, 2007, and was sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce of China, covered over 30 industries from energy to home appliances. More than 15,000 products were exhibited in an area of 20,000 square metres at the Crocus-expo centre. The exhibition attracted more than 86,000 Russian visitors and the trade volume of agreements signed on the sideline of the event reached 4.9 billion US dollars, according to figures from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce.

#### ■ Justice Rana Bhagwandas Becomes Pakistan's First Hindu Chief Justice

Justice Rana Bhagwandas was sworn in at the Supreme Court's Karachi registry on March 24, 2007, as the first Hindu Chief Justice of Pakistan by Justice Javed Iqbal, who functioned as the interim acting Chief Justice after the removal of the Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary on March 9, 2007. Speaking after the swearing-in ceremony, Justice Bhagwandas said that the judiciary would not disappoint the people and that they would soon hear "good news". He assured the people of Pakistan that the judiciary under him would proceed without any bias in the matter of the Presidential reference against the dismissed Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary. He said the

Supreme Judicial Council, the five-judge panel inquiring into the reference, would soon decide whether Mr. Chaudhary should be given an open hearing as he has demanded, or if it should continue to hear the case in camera.

Justice Bhagwandas said the inquiry would be conducted speedily, and that he would do everything to maintain the independence and dignity of the judiciary. He appealed to the media to avoid comments on the reference against Mr. Chaudhary as it was sub judice. Meanwhile, the Sindh and Karachi Bar Associations continued protests over the removal of the Chief Justice as Justice Bhagwandas was being sworn in. The two associations boycotted the ceremony.

#### ■ The 12th ASEAN Summit

The 12th ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) Summit officially opened in Cebu (The Philippines) on January 13, 2007, with the full participation of Heads of State from the 10 member countries, namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Besides them, the Heads of some Dialogue Partners, including India, China, Japan and Australia were also invited to take part in the summit. The Indian delegation was headed by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. The theme of 2007 summit was "One Sharing And Caring Community."

After discussions and deliberations on a diverse range of issues, leaders of ASEAN signed the Cebu Declaration Towards One Caring And Sharing Community and committed to promote a socially prosperous community within the region. The Cebu Declaration cited the need to reduce poverty, protect the rights of children and women, improve education and cherish the environment on their way to the economic integration by 2015. The document reaffirmed the ASEAN countries' commitment to realise the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations as part of their efforts of socio-cultural community building. The Heads of 10 countries also agreed

to rely on the ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial bodies to achieve the goals of their collective social welfare with clear timelines.

Leaders from the 10-member Association considered moving the bloc into a more “rules-based” community at the concluding session of the summit on January 15, 2007. ASEAN leaders adopted the Convention on Counter Terrorism, a historic pact that enables member countries’ anti-terror units to track movements of suspicious money or people throughout the region, and to allow for the extradition of terror suspects. The convention is the first and a legally binding one on anti-terrorism.

#### ■ **New UN Chief To Focus On Regional Conflicts**



Mr. Ban Ki-moon, former Foreign Minister and well-known diplomat of South Korea, took over as United Nations Secretary-General on January 1, 2007, facing numerous crises across the globe as well as the challenging task of

reforming the global organisation itself. The 62-year-old diplomat’s handling of the reform, launched in 2005 by his predecessor Mr. Kofi Annan, will be closely watched by UN members, notably the United States, which strongly backed his candidacy.

Aware of the huge task ahead of him, Mr. Ban said at a news conference on his first day at one of the world’s most prestigious offices that he wanted to “restore trust” in the United Nations. In subsequent interviews he promised to devote most of his attention to solving the immediate problem of regional conflicts around the world. He said he wanted to be a “harmoniser” and a “bridgebuilder”, pointing out that the conflict in West Asia, the Lebanese situation and the crisis in Darfur (Sudan) would be among his priorities.

