

Agni-V propels India into elite ICBM club

India propelled itself into an elite club of nations with Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) technology by successfully test-firing nuclear-capable Agni-V, which covered a range of more than 5,000 km. The significance of the success lies in the fact that Agni-V is the most formidable missile in India's arsenal, with the longest range. With this grand success, India joins the U.S., Russia, France and China, which have ICBM capability. With India's policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, Agni-V will provide the country with depth in deterrence. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has designed and developed Agni-V. Although DRDO officials claim that Agni-V "is not any country-specific," the fact remains that the missile can reach most parts of China. The three-stage, 17-metre tall Agni-V, weighing 50 tonnes, is capable of carrying a nuclear warhead of 1.1 tonnes. Avinash Chander, Chief Controller (Missiles and Strategic Systems), DRDO, and Programme Director, Agni-V, called it a "fantastic mission, which has achieved a range of more than 5,000 km. The success gave India the confidence to go ahead with a larger number of missiles and longer ranges". V.G. Sekaran, Director, Advanced Systems Laboratory, Hyderabad, described the success as "overwhelming."

Ponneelan elected president of Progressive Writers' Association

Noted Tamil writer and Sahitya Akademi Award winner Ponneelan has been elected the new all-India president of the Progressive Writers' Association. He is the first Tamil writer to head this select club. He will hold this post for a period of four years. Mr. Ponneelan is at present a presidium member of the Tamil Nadu Association of Arts and Literature (Tamil Nadu Kalai Ilakkiya Perumandram) founded by late Communist leader P. Jeevanantham. The Progressive Writers' Association was formed way back in 1936 and renowned writers including K. M. Munshi, Premchand, Mulkraj Anand, Sajjad Zaheer and Kamala Prasad have served as all-India president of this forum on various occasions.

Now road toll can be paid without stopping at plazas

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways C.P. Joshi unveiled India's first Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology-based Electronic Toll Collection (ETC) Plaza at Chandimandir. All the highways in the country would be enabled with RFID technique that "helps users to pay the toll tax without stopping at toll plazas and reduces traffic congestion and commuting time. Toll statements can also be made available online to the road users and they need not stop for the receipt.

Uranium mine to be commissioned

Atomic Energy Commission chairman Srikumar Banerjee will commission the Rs. 1,106 crore uranium ore mine and processing plant set up by Uranium Corporation of India in Kadapa district of Karnataka. The Thummalapalle Project would boost India's nuclear energy plans and help reduce costs by helping switching over from coal. It would give a fillip to power production from nuclear plants from three per cent in 2011 to over 30 per cent by 2050. About 1.10 million tonnes of ore can be mined annually at Thummalapalle. On processing, the ore can yield 250 tonnes of uranium oxide and, on further processing, can be used as fuel for nuclear reactors. The Thummalapalle mine is considered to have world's largest reserves of 1.50 lakh tonnes of uranium.

Centre to instal solar panels in individual houses

In an ambitious clean technology initiative, the Centre is planning to install solar panels in individual households. The power generated will be supplied to the house and excess energy directly transmitted to the grid, according to G. Giridhar, Director, Solar Radiation Resource Assessment, a wing of the Union Ministry of Renewable Energy Sources. Dr Giridhar said the excess power generated from the panels would be transmitted to the grid through special switches, which would be fixed in every household. The individual household would be financially rewarded for the quantum of power it contributed to the grid. The new system will be launched initially in Puducherry and extended in a phased manner to other States. The Power Grid Corporation will be the implementing agency for the new system.

India's first aero city project suffers due to Centre-Mamata spat

The off and on sparring between the Centre and West Bengal government was evident yet again when the Union government threw a spanner in the works of the ongoing Rs 10,000 cr Bengal Aerotropolis Projects Ltd (BAPL), India's first aero city project, at Andal. The Union coal ministry sent its objections to the project in a letter to chief minister Mamata Banerjee, saying it would block an A-grade coal reserve which would affect several states, said coal minister Sri Prakash Jaiswal. Coal India (CIL) had first raised such objection in September 2008. Later, the project site was realigned to release 150 acres of coal-bearing land. About the

proposed site of Aerotropolis, CIL had said that a majority of the area demarcated for the project has huge coal reserve, and any permanent structure there would affect the future energy security of the country.

Miss Lovely only Indian film at Cannes

Ashim Ahluwalia, who directed 'Miss Lovely', is representing India at Cannes this year and the film will be screened as a part of the Un Certain Regard section of the festival. The film, starring Nawazuddin Siddiqui of 'Kahaani' fame, Niharika Singh and Anil George, is a Hindi feature film set in the lower depths of Bombay's 'C' grade film industry. Other films in the competition section include 'Holy Motors' (Leos Carax), 'Cosmopolis' (David Cronenberg) and Lee Daniels' 'Paperboy'.

First Koodankulam reactor may be commissioned by June

Expressing satisfaction over the progress in preparing the first reactor of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project for commissioning, Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) Chairman and Managing Director S.K. Jain has said the KKNPP was waiting for the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board's clearance for the opening of the reactor pressure vessel for inspecting the internal components' performance and subsequent loading of enriched uranium fuel rods. Mr. Jain was along with a team of Russian specialists headed by Valery Limarenko, president of Atomstroyexports, the Russian firm constructing the reactors at KKNPP, to ascertain the progress after the stalled works resumed on March 19 to ensure the early commissioning of the first of the 2 X 1,000-MWe reactor. After the successful completion of the 'hot run,' test reports were submitted to the AERB for review by a team of experts.

Sushma Swaraj hands over railway line to Sri Lanka

When a railway project built with Indian assistance was handed over to Sri Lanka at a railway station, it marked a departure from tradition: it was not an Indian Minister who did the honour but the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Sushma Swaraj, who is leading an Indian parliamentary delegation. The upgraded coastal railway line, costing \$167.4 million, was completed ahead of schedule by an Indian public sector company, IRCON. Work on phase-1 of the project, from Galle to Matara (42 km), commenced in September 2009 and the upgraded track was opened to traffic on February 16, 2011. The phase-2 work (Kauthara to Galle, 71 km) began in November 2010. The section will be open to traffic from April 19. The upgraded track will have a speed potential of 100 kmph. Ms. Swaraj visited the Kankasanthurai harbour, where India has completed a \$22-million wreck removal project. As many as 10 shipwrecks were removed from the harbour.

Syria signs initial protocol for UN observer mission

Syria has signed a preliminary accord outlining a protocol for a UN mission to monitor a fragile week-old ceasefire in the strife-torn country, the two sides announced. Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad signed the deal with a member of a UN advance team, the ministry said in a statement. "This agreement comes within the framework of Syrian efforts aimed at making the Annan plan succeed and to facilitate the UN observer mission while respecting Syria's sovereignty," the statement said. A spokesman for UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan, who drafted the six-point ceasefire accord, confirmed in Geneva that an agreement had been concluded between the two parties.

G-Bissau junta defy calls for democracy

Guinea-Bissau's junta and opposition parties pressed on with plans for a lengthy transition, defying international calls for a return to democracy and brushing off a sanctions threat. The World Bank and the African Development Bank suspended development programmes to the chronically unstable west African nation in the wake of the April 12 coup which ousted the government. The calls for a return to constitutional order join an international chorus, and come a day after the junta and opposition parties dissolved government and agreed on a two-year transition period until fresh elections. But after nearly four decades of coups, counter-coups and assassinations in the continuous power struggle between army and state since an independence war, Bissau-Guineans hold little hope that a transition will lead to stability. The opposition denounced the coup but has negotiated an agreement with the junta.

KKR to pick up stake in TVS Logistics

Global investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. L.P. (KKR) has decided to pick up a 'significant minority stake' in TVS Logistics Services, a company promoted by TVS & Sons. KKR will be the second global investment firm to park equity funds into TVS Logistics. Global investment banking firm Goldman Sachs had invested Rs.100 crore into TVS Logistics to acquire a 'significant minority stake' way back in 2008. Now, Goldman Sachs is set to up its investment in the company.

Connecting customers, the Volvo way

Swedish luxury car maker Volvo is stepping on the gas to take on competition from German brands in India. Besides expanding its dealer network and strengthening marketing operations, it has decided to engage with prospective customers through a range of activities, including golf tournaments. There has been a new focus on India from the head office," Volvo Auto India Pvt Ltd Managing Director Tomas Ernberg said. The potential for luxury cars in India was huge. Worldwide, luxury cars account for 10 per cent of all cars sold whereas in India their numbers add up to a mere one per cent. "It [market] is not over crowded and no one wants to be away from India," he said, adding that by 2020, the share of luxury cars was expected to increase to 3 per cent.

Smartphone from Lava

Mobile handset-maker Lava International, launched first smartphone with Intel Corporation's processor. Priced at Rs.22,000, the 'Xolo X900' mobile phone comes with high-performance 1.6 GHz Atom processor with 'Hyper Threading Technology', best suited for multi-media operations and hi-speed connectivity. The smartphone that runs on Android Gingerbread comes with 4.03-inch high-resolution LCD touch screen, an 8-megapixel camera and battery life of up to 5 hours of 3G browsing, 45 hours of audio and 8 hours of talk time. "This is the first smartphone in India, powered by Intel's Atom Z2460, which is the fastest processor available (on phone) in the market," Lava Co-Founder and Director Vishal Sehgal told . Lava International had announced its partnership with Intel at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona in February.

Bangladesh High Court blocks team's Pakistan tour

The Bangladesh High Court has halted the planned tour of Pakistan by the Bangladesh cricket team and asked the government and cricket board to justify the decision when no international team has visited the country following a terror attack in 2009. The secretary of the Youth and Sports Ministry, the chairman of the National Sports Council and president of the Bangladesh Cricket Board have been made respondents to the ruling. The Bangladesh team was scheduled to tour Pakistan from April 29 to 30 to play a One-Day International and a Twenty20 match in Lahore under a controversial move believed to be solely taken by the Bangladesh Cricket Board President A.H.M. Mustafa Kamal. Meanwhile in Melbourne, the Federation of International Cricketers Association (FICA) CEO Tim May described Bangladesh's decision to tour Pakistan "chaotic and contradictory", and remarked that players' safety should not be put at risk.

Pfeilschifter pips Yi Siling

Sonja Pfeilschifter of Germany served a warning in the run-up to the Olympics as she clinched the gold 0.5 point ahead of the reigning World champion and World record-holder Yi Siling of China in the World Cup shooting in London. The four-time World champion Pfeilschifter has won World Cup gold medals 27 times, apart from the World Cup finals six times. Though it was the Chinese who shot a perfect 400 to lead the qualification in a field of 85, two points ahead of Pfeilschifter, it was the German who showed her class with a 105 in the final.

Indian men, women's teams post wins

Indian men and women's teams won the second carrom 'Test' against Sri Lanka in Colombo, according to information received here. Indian men defeated Sri Lanka 3-0, while the women's team conceded a match before wrapping it up 2-1. India had also won the first 'Test' in the three-match series.

Ricco gets 12-year ban

Italian cyclist Riccardo Ricco was given a 12-year doping ban by the National Anti-doping Tribunal. The Tribunal accepted the Italian Olympic Committee's anti-doping prosecutor's request after Ricco was accused of giving himself a blood transfusion. Ricco maintains he is innocent and merely injected himself with an iron solution but a doctor who operated on him claimed Ricco had tried to give himself a blood transfusion.

Awards for Vengsarkar and Shiny

Former India captain and former chief selector Dilip Vengsarkar and acclaimed international athlete of yesteryears Shiny Abraham-Wilson will be given Lifetime Achievement awards in the Bluechip-Calcutta Sports Journalists' Club annual awards function. National table tennis champion Anthony Amalraj and promising youngster Soumyajit Ghosh have been named the best senior and junior sportspersons of the country respectively. The event will be held at the Town Hall on April 26.