

Guj HC rejects bail plea of chain-snatcher

DNA Correspondent, AHMEDABAD

Taking note of rising incidents of chain-snatching in the city, Justice Z.K. Saiyed of Gujarat High Court has rejected the bail application of Shailesh Bhatane involved in several chain-snatching incidents. Bhatane, who has been languishing in jail for 18 months after being caught by Naroda police, had moved HC after the sessions court rejected his bail application.

The HC observed that "there is prima facie involvement of the accused in the offence". The court also observed that the offence of snatching of chains and mangalsutra from women is happening day in and day out in Ahmedabad as also all over Gujarat and "nobody is safe in moving wearing ornaments like chain and mangalsutra".

Police records show that in the past five years there have been 4,002 cases of chain-snatching incidents in Gujarat and 521 cases in Ahmedabad alone. The court observed that this is a very serious offence. Looking at the facts of the present case, it is clearly established that Bhatane is involved in a very serious offence and if such types of persons involved in habitual offences are released on bail, nobody would be safe and no women would be able to move safely wearing such types of ornaments.

India ready to negotiate FREE TRADE PACT WITH US

PM SAYS AGREEMENT WILL BE SIMILAR TO ONE SIGNED WITH 10-MEMBER ASEAN

Uttara Choudhury, WASHINGTON

Prime minister Manmohan Singh indicated on Monday that he was open to negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with the US, on the lines of a pact inked in August with the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

"I don't mind exploring the possibility of an FTA with the US," Singh told the Council of Foreign Relations.

According to Indian trade officials, an FTA with the US could ease barriers for US firms to invest in India's fast-growing economy and provide greater access and visas for Indian professionals to America's services industries.

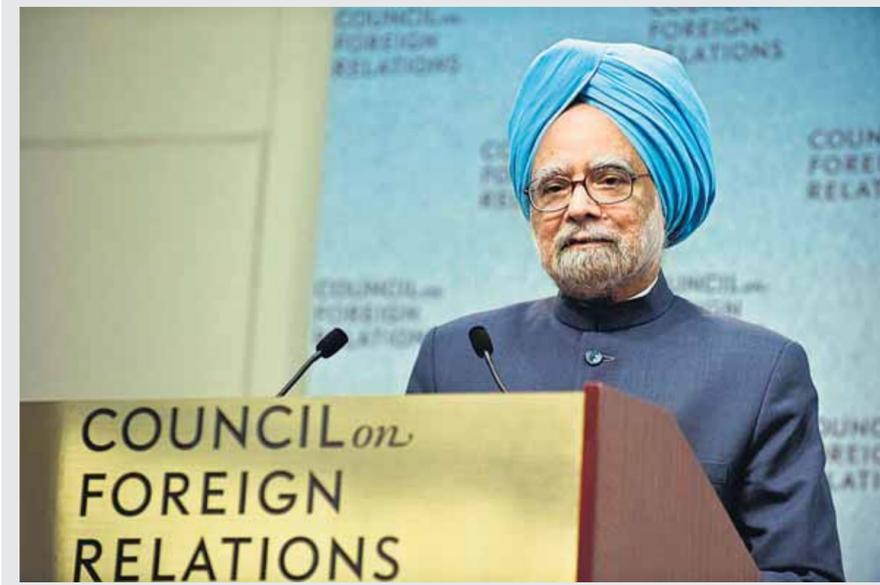
India is forging free-trade or comprehensive economic agreements with key trade partners, while pushing for a global deal under the World Trade Organization. It recently signed an FTA with Asean in Bangkok, for trade in goods, after six years of intense negotiations. The pact does not cover software and information technology. But both parties to the FTA expect a \$10 billion boost in trade.

Aware of the gruelling negotiations FTAs demand, Singh observed that reaching a deal in the Doha round of global trade negotiations would eliminate the need for an FTA with the US.

"The multilateral trading system itself should evolve in a direction where there is a reduced role for trade distortions represented by tariff and non-tariff barriers," said Singh.

Singh arrived in Washington on Sunday, on a four-day state visit, to boost economic ties.

Two-way trade, at \$5 billion in 1990, reached \$14 billion in 2000 and rose to nearly \$50 billion last year.



Prime minister Manmohan Singh addressing the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington on Monday. —AFP

INDIA WANTS US TO STAY IN AFGHANISTAN

As the United States deliberates its Afghanistan strategy, prime minister Manmohan Singh fired off a gentle warning on Monday about the risks of quitting too soon in Afghanistan.

"I sincerely hope the world community will have the wisdom to stay engaged in that process. Any premature talk of exit will only embolden the terrorist elements who are out to destabilise not only our part of the world but the civilised world everywhere," he told the US Chamber of Commerce.

On Monday evening, he told the Council of Foreign Relations that if the Taliban and Al Qaeda succeed in Afghanistan, it would have catastrophic results for the security and stability not only in Pakistan but the whole of South Asia.

"Please don't forget, we are talking of the future of 1.8 billion people living in South Asia. It will also affect the course of evolution in the Middle East as well as in Central Asia and may be beyond these regions as well," the PM said.

—Uttara Choudhury, Washington

India wants US to get on same page on terrorism

Says military hardware, & aid given to Pak for use against Taliban, is being diverted

Uttara Choudhury, WASHINGTON

Prime minister Manmohan Singh on Monday emphasised the maturity of India's response after the terrorist attacks a year back in Mumbai. He said India didn't lash out or strike Pakistan; instead, it told Islamabad to arrest the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks and dismantle their terrorist network, but it was dragging its feet.

"Pakistan has done something to control the activities of the Taliban terrorist groups in federally administered areas but it is our sincere belief that it has not acted as it should have acted in dealing with terrorist elements which are using their energies to target our country. Pakistan has not used its machinery to bring to book all those murderous gangs who perpetrated the horrible crime in Mumbai," Singh told the Council of Foreign Relations.

He said, "Innocent citizens lost their lives, several from foreign countries, including six from the United States, two from Canada. Pressure must be exerted on Pakistan by the world community to do much more to bring to book all people responsible for this crime. There is impeccable evidence that the conspiracy was planned in Pakistan, it was executed with the connivance of people who are still roaming around freely in Pakistan."

Ashley Tellis, senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, warned that Indian and American perceptions were not aligned on some issues of high politics. "One issue I would flag illustratively is, first some dimensions of terrorism — where India is very concerned that terrorism emerging from Pakistan be accorded the same priority in US interests as terrorism pertaining to al Qaeda and the Taliban. This is one area where both sides need to work to a more fruitful understanding of what is possible." To Delhi dismay, the US has looked the other way while much of the \$10.5 billion in military hardware and cash subsidies given to Pakistan's army for use against the Taliban has been diverted to building up arm capabilities targeted at India.

speedread



CALL IT FIRST BANG: The Large Hadron Collider, the world's biggest and most expensive science experiment, produced its first collisions on Monday, said scientists at CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, outside Geneva. p11

SON AGAINST CAMUS' REBURIAL

Paris: President Nicolas Sarkozy wants to transfer the remains of the writer, Albert Camus, to the Pantheon, one of the most hallowed burial places in France, but the plan has run into opposition from the Nobel laureate's son, Jean, who does not think his father would have wanted the honour. However, Jean's sister, Catherine Camus, who manages her father's estate, is prepared to give her approval and has spoken with Sarkozy on the subject. Le Monde said.

NEPAL RITUAL DRAWS MILLIONS

Kathmandu: Up to 40 lakh Nepalese and Indian devotees thronged the famous Gadhimai temple on Tuesday to witness a slaughter of thousands of animals in a mass-sacrifice. Tens of thousands of buffaloes, goats and birds would be slaughtered over the next few days as part of a ritual sacrifice, dating back hundreds of years, which has drawn widespread international condemnation and outrage.

State dinner is like Broadway play

World watches as India gets the red-carpet treatment in the US, thrice in a decade

Uttara Choudhury, WASHINGTON

President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle will host their first state dinner on Tuesday evening, almost a year into their White House tenure, and it is shaping up to be the US power capital's most glittering party.

Hollywood, Bollywood, stuffed shirts, fancy pants and political top dogs will converge for a glittering party in honour of prime minister Manmohan Singh on the White House lawns. The White House kitchen garden, Michelle's much-

discussed vegetable patch, which has been the fulcrum of debates in America about healthy eating, will no doubt, have a starring role at Tuesday's dinner — Singh is vegetarian. White House social secretary Desiree Rogers and White House top chef Cristeta Comerford are bustling with gruelling last-minute chores. A state dinner is so much more like a big-cast Broadway play than a dinner, quipped state dinner planners.

"Dressing for the Obamas' first state dinner is a particular fashion challenge because it combines protocol, modern style and politics. The event cries out for a full-length gown. A bit of cleavage is fine but a dress that requires double-stick tape should be saved for the Grammys," warned fashion critic Robin Givhan. "It's always gracious to pay



Oprah Winfrey may attend the state dinner on the South Lawn

homage to the country being honoured. So in celebration of India, guests might choose colour and embellishment, gowns with movement and drape. But

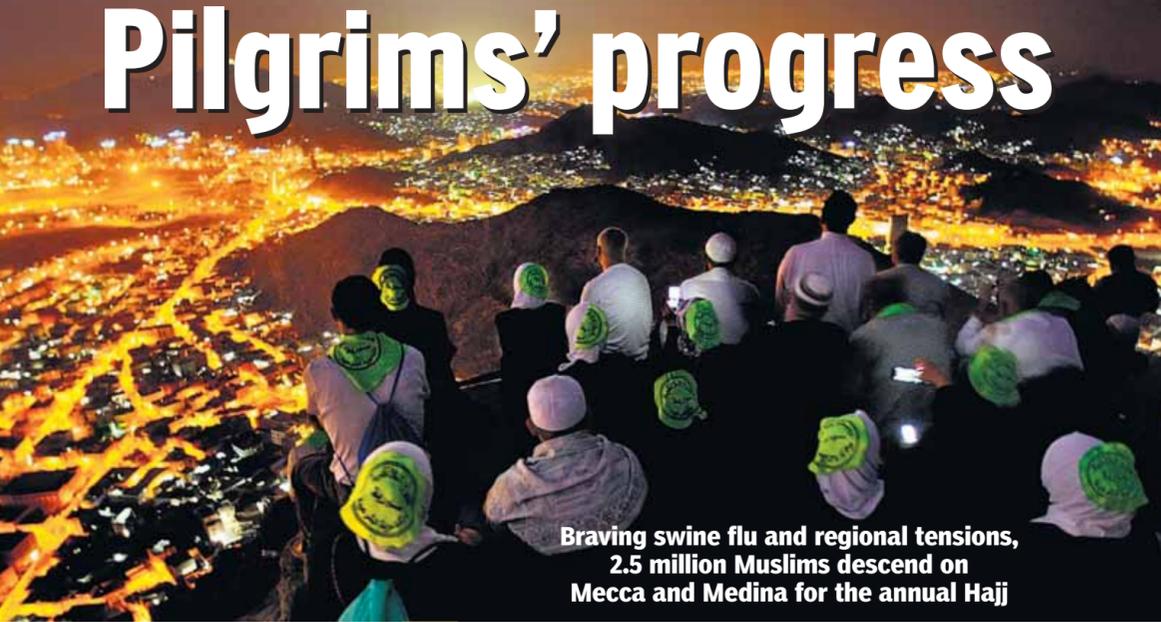
remember, this is not a costume ball. Think subtlety, not Bollywood."

Instead of the State Dining Room, the Obamas will dine with 400 guests in a phantasmagorical, heated white tent on the South Lawn. Several notables are good bets, such as Oprah Winfrey and Chicago hotel billionaire Penny Pritzker. Secretary of state Hillary Clinton will be there, as will treasury secretary Timothy Geithner and Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal. Mukesh Ambani, who is in the midst of a \$12-billion grab for bankrupt chemicals maker Lyondell-Basell has snagged an invite. Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai may also make a star turn at the White House.

This is the third time in a decade that India has been given state dinner treatment.

Pilgrims' progress

Braving swine flu and regional tensions, 2.5 million Muslims descend on Mecca and Medina for the annual Hajj



Jeddah: Braving the swine flu pandemic and tensions between the Saudi hosts and Shi'ite Iran, more than 2.5 million Muslim faithful are descending on the holy cities of Mecca and Medina this week for the hajj.

Under heightened monitoring by some 20,000 medical staff and more than 100,000 security personnel, the world's largest annual pilgrimage kicks off on Wednesday in western Saudi Arabia. Four deaths from the influenza A (H1N1) virus announced on Saturday — the first among pilgrims — served as a warning to the faithful who have mostly eschewed surgical masks and other preventive measures. But the number was less than had been feared by the Saudi authorities.

Pilgrims from all over the world have poured into Saudi Arabia, by plane, bus and boat since October, for what for many is an once-in-a-lifetime

experience. Among the other concerns, Saudi officials are hoping also that repeated deadly stampedes — the last in 2006 left 364 dead — are a thing of the past. Builders just completed a massive five-storey pedestrian walkway for the most crowded stage of the Hajj — the stoning of the devil at the



Jamarat in Mina Valley — designed to avoid the panics of the past. The 950-metre-long, 80-metre-wide bridge \$ 1.2 billion. Last month, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and president Mahmud Ahmadinejad charged that Saudi Arabia might mistreat the 65,000 pilgrims

from Iran, the vast majority of whom are Shi'ite. Leading Saudi officials and clerics rejected the Iranian accusation and warned Tehran not to abuse the hajj for political purposes.

Disturbances involving Iranian pilgrims killed more than 400 people in 1987. General Mansur al-Turki, the interior ministry official in charge of Hajj security, said he does not expect trouble, but warned that protests "are prohibited in the Hajj and we will not let them take place."

We will not allow any actions that might disturb any other pilgrims, or affect their safety."

Turki's focus is also on the possibility that al Qaeda could try to use the Hajj as an opportunity to launch an attack on the kingdom. Already this year, Saudi authorities have thwarted several attempted attacks by al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula, which is based in neighbouring Yemen. —AFP

Sea of humanity

The annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca takes place from November 25 to 29, with some 2.5 mn or more Muslim faithful expected from all over the world.

An estimated 2 million foreign pilgrims are expected to take part, while pilgrims from inside Saudi Arabia are forecast at 500,000.

The biggest Hajj contingent is from Indonesia — 200,000 — while India is sending 164,000 and Pakistan about 140,000.

Saudi Arabia is deploying some 100,000 security forces in and around Mecca, Medina and Jeddah for the Hajj.

From a massive command centre they monitor thousands of CCTV cameras, including 1,852 in and around Mecca's Grand Mosque, and 600 at the Jamarat bridge where pilgrims stone the devil.

Health personnel have been increased this year to 20K to cope with the H1N1 threat in addition to other health worries.

The Grand Mosque at the centre of Mecca, where pilgrims gather to pray and circle the cubic Kaaba building, covers 39 hectares and can hold more than 1 mn people.

The Kaaba rests on a marble base and is built from granite, and has a door made from 280 kg of pure gold. The black silk kiswah covering, made anew every year, is embroidered with holy phrases using 150 kg of gold and silver thread.

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A'BAD CAN'T WIN HERITAGE-CITY RACE!

"Filing of nomination is a long process and it takes at least two years. The city has to come up with tentative, primary and representative lists documenting its different types of heritage."

She added that she and other Unesco officials would be only too willing to help with technical cooperation if officials from Ahmedabad begin with the necessary paperwork. Unesco had launched the 'Network for Indian Cities of Living Heritage' at a three-day conference on 'Indian Cities of Living Heritage' that was held at Jaipur in September 2006. Ahmedabad was among the many Indian cities that took part in that inaugural conference.

The network was to serve as a common platform of Indian cities that wanted to make heritage conservation a positive part of their development. "But the network, too, has not helped," Bolomey says. Meanwhile, heritage experts in the city agree that a pitch for World Heritage City status should first be made for the Walled City with its 14 imposing gates. Besides its Sultanate architecture, old Ahmedabad has around 100 Jain temples, the 'pol' houses, and the 'chabutaras', all of which capture the essence of community living.

Bolomey says that to show its commitment to preserving its heritage, Ahmedabad has to take the first steps towards filing a nomination with Unesco. "Other Indian cities will then follow," she says. In the year 2000, the French had signed an MoU with the city on heritage conservation and

Hudco had revised its rules to allow loans for restoration of ancient buildings. Later, laws on heritage conservation were also passed. "Ahmedabad must take the lead because it has dealt with heritage legislation earlier," Bolomey said.

CITY GAMER SET FOR INT'L DEBUT

He said Indian art continued to fascinate people from across the globe. "I have always found Indian art inspiring," Chokhavatia said. "It is the inspiration behind my game's design." Chokhavatia earned a diploma in 3D animation from Canada while working there for 'Ubisoft', the software company famous for the exciting action adventure game series, 'Prince of Persia'.

He returned to India in 2006. "While working for Ubisoft, I realised that I must design my own game," he said. "Ubisoft gave me the right kind of exposure to designing for videogames." He saved Rs30 lakh which he knew he would need to develop the game. "The game's official launch will take place on gamepress.com," said Chokhavatia. "But before that, gamers can visit its pages on Facebook, Twitter and other blogs."

Gold nears 18K mark

"In addition to the last two factors, it is speculation that is driving up gold prices," said Devang Choksi, a Surat-based bullion trader.

He added that the recent purchase of 200 tonnes of gold from the IMF by the Reserve Bank of India had also boosted sentiment and gold prices.

While gold prices are going up, demand at the retail level has taken a significant hit.