

# India Faces Significant External, Internal Terror Threats: US Report

Washington: (IANS) Besides “persistent and significant external threats” from groups like Pakistan’s Lashkar-e-Taeba and Jaish-e-Mohammad and Bangladesh’s Harakat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami-Bangladesh, India faces numerous attacks from domestic terror outfits, according to a new US report. Over 1,000 people have died from terrorist attacks in India in 2009, the report noted.

“India remained one of the countries most afflicted by terrorism with over 1,000 deaths attributed to terrorist attacks in 2009, primarily in Kashmir, the North-east, and the Maoist

affected “Red Corridor”, the State Department noted Thursday in its annual Congressionally mandated report on global terrorism.

However despite being “clearly committed to combating terrorism, the Indian government’s counterterrorism efforts remained hampered by its outdated and overburdened law enforcement and legal systems,” the report suggested.

“Although there were no large-scale assaults similar to the Nov 26, 2008 attacks in Mumbai, senior government officials warned that India remained at risk on the basis of the volume of cred-

ible threats the government continued to receive,” it said.

Taking note of a series of terrorist attacks, the report, however, said “the state of Jammu and Kashmir, historically victim to the largest number of foreign terrorist attacks, saw casualties decline significantly from previous years.”

Citing Home Minister P. Chidambaram, the report noted that in December 700 foreign insurgents were active in the state, down from 800 earlier in the year even as 71 civilians and 52 members of the security forces were killed in terrorist-related violence in the state through November.

Noting that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had told Parliament that “Maoists/Naxalites insurgent groups represented the most significant threat to domestic security,” it said “Maoists/Naxalites conducted numerous attacks against police and local government officials and bombed railways, killing civilians and disrupting services.”

“Ethno-nationalist insurgent groups remained active, particularly in the Northeast,” the report said noting, “The ULFA, a domestic terrorist group banned by India in 1990, continued a campaign of

bombings in Assam resulting in 27 fatalities this year.”

With the return of the ruling Congress Party-led coalition government to power despite criticism that security and intelligence lapses failed to prevent the 26/11 attacks, the new government instituted several reforms designed to augment its existing security structures and to develop new capabilities.

In the wake of the Mumbai attacks, India’s Parliament has introduced bills to restructure its counterterrorism laws, the report said noting the new National Investigation Agency had registered several cases in 2009, the report noted.

The trial of Ajmal Kasab, the alleged lone surviving gunman involved in the Mumbai attack, continued in Mumbai.

Amendments to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) came into force in June, furthering India’s ability to combat the financing of terrorism, the report noted.

“In December, India’s Narcotics Control Bureau arrested Naresh Kumar Jain, allegedly a significant underground banker, as part of an operation to close a global network of illegal money transfers.”

Senior Indian government officials, including the home minister, visited the United States to advance bilateral counterterrorism cooperation, culminating in the conclusion of the US-India Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s official state visit in November, it noted.



## Sunita Williams Headed For Stars Again

Washington: (IANS) Indian American astronaut Sunita Williams, who holds the record of the longest spaceflight (195 days) for female space travelers, will head for the stars once again in June 2012.

Williams, 44, would take over as station commander at the International Space Station that was her home in the sky from Dec 9, 2006 to June 22, 2007.

She will be joined on the Soyuz 31 flight to the space station by flight engineers Russian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko and Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide, the space agencies of the three nations announced recently.

Daughter of Gujarat born neuroanatomist

Deepak Pandya and Slovak mother Bonnie Pandya, Williams was born in Euclid, Ohio, but considers Needham, Massachusetts where her parents live as her hometown.

After launching aboard Discovery, Williams arranged to donate her pony tail to Locks of Love. Fellow astronaut Joan Higginbotham cut her hair aboard the International Space Station and the Discovery crew brought the ponytail back to earth. Among the

personal items Williams took with her on her last trip were a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, a small figurine of Ganesha and some samosas. The question is what would she carry this time around.



## Indian-Americans Spell Success With Own Contests

Washington: (IANS) After dominating national spelling bees, enterprising Indian Americans have begun their own regional leagues that serve as a stepping stone to the South Asian Spelling Bee and the bigger and extremely prestigious nationwide spelling contests.

Catering to just kids from India and neighboring nations, some of these competitions have big-name sponsors and hefty cash prizes. Spelling bees are carried live on Indian-theme satellite stations and are covered by Indian newspapers, the Wall Street Journal reported.

Though Indian-Americans make up a mere 1 percent of the population, they have come to dominate the American spelling-bee circuit. Eight of the past 12 Scripps champions have been of Indian descent-including the last three in a row.

The 2002 documentary “Spellbound,” which followed eight teenagers as they prepared for and took part in the 1999 bee, helped put Indian dominance on the map. That year, the \$40,000 grand prize went to Nupur Lala, an Indian-American girl who correctly spelled “logorrhea” in the final round.

In the coming season of the ABC reality TV show “Shaq vs.,” in which Shaquille O’Neal challenges top athletes at their own sports, the winner

of last year’s Scripps National Spelling Bee, 14-year-old Kavya Shivashankar, will be shown competing in a spell-off against O’Neal in the fall.

For all their success, Indian-Americans have only recently become the masters of competitive spelling, the Journal said.

In 1989, Ratnam Chitturi, founder of the non-profit North South Foundation, which stages regional and national academic contests for Indian-American children, noticed that in standardised tests Indian-Americans were consistently performing above average in every subject but English.

He set out to change that by creating a spelling bee pitched just to Indian-Americans. The first competition was held in 1993, and it has since spread to 75 locations throughout the country. Today, about 3,000 children, ranging from 1st to 8th grade, participate each year.

When Lala won the Scripps bee in 1999, Rahul Walia, an advertising executive who lives in New Jersey, sensed a business opportunity.

He launched the South Asian Spelling Bee in 2008, figuring that allowing South Asian kids to go head to head would make it extra competitive. About 400 kids under 14 compete at the nine regional South Asian Spelling Bees. At the finals, the winner claims a \$10,000 grand prize.



## Indo-US Ties ‘Defining Partnership Of 21st Century’: Senate

Washington: (IANS) Noting that President Barack Obama considers India-US relationship as “one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century,” the US senate has resolved to foster and advance the strategic partnership between the two nations.

A bipartisan resolution introduced by Republican John Cornyn and co-sponsored by Democrat Christopher Dodd, to mark the 63rd anniversary of India’s independence, also celebrated “the contributions of Americans of Indian descent to society in the United States.”

Noting that the first state dinner hosted by Obama was held in honor of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in November 2009, the resolution recalled the two nations “have pursued a strategic partnership based on common interests and shared commitments to freedom, democracy, pluralism, human rights, and the rule of law”

The US and India have undertaken a cooperative effort in the area of civilian nuclear power, which Congress approved through the enactment of the US-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Non-Proliferation Enhancement Act, it noted

The strong relationship between the US India is based on mutual trust and respect, enables close collaboration across a broad spectrum of strategic interests, including counter-terrorism, democracy promotion, regional economic development, human rights, and scientific research, the resolution said.

The Senate resolution also acknowledged that since 2001, Indians have comprised the largest for-

eign student population on college campuses in the US, accounting for approximately 15 per cent of all foreign students in the country.

Noting that there are more than two million Americans of Indian descent in the United States, it acknowledged the lasting contributions to the social and economic fabric of the US made by the Indian Americans.

## US Bans Child Adoption From Nepal

Kathmandu: (IANS) The Barack Obama government has halted the adoption of abandoned children from Nepal indefinitely due to growing allegations of child trafficking and falsification of documents, often in connivance with government authorities.

The ban came into effect from recently and would continue indefinitely. However, the US Department of State said American citizens could still adopt children who were not abandoned but whose natural parents were willing to relinquish them though DNA tests could be required to prove they were the real parents.

A joint statement issued by the US Department of State and US Citizenship and Immigration Services said the step was taken to protect the rights and interests of Nepali children and their families after field visits to orphanages and police departments showed that documents describing children up for adoption as abandoned were often unreliable.