

Report # 106

Business and Politics in Muslim World

South East Asia

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6 February to 12 February

(Outline)

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Summary

At Political Front

- Indonesia

There are currently hundreds moderate Muslim organizations in Indonesia, many of them set up following the fall of President Soeharto in May 1998. The nurturing of these civic organizations may be as important to the future of Indonesia's democracy as is the curtailment of extremists.

Furthermore, simple political maturity, such as developing true parties with accountability and that stand for something beyond personality as well the development of an educated and experienced electorate should protect and stabilize Indonesia's democracy.

- Thailand

In order to pool together a million people to take part in their anti-government rally later this month, Thailand's anti-government red-shirt movement and the opposition Pheu Thai Party are making moves to mobilise masses across the country, an informed source said on Thursday

- Malaysia

The political crisis occurring in states under Pakatan's rule is proof of the opposition pact's inability to govern, Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis said. He said that differences among opposition leaders, resulting in some of them leaving the party, showed weaknesses in the administration. "The don't have the agenda to help the people, only the agenda to criticise the government," he told reporters after opening the Rompin Umno convention at Universiti Tenaga Nasional in Muadzam Shah, near here on Saturday.

FORMER Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is a living legend of our nation and also a world renowned figure. He has been an inspiration for so many of us. He has attracted us in so many of his ways, from intelligence, persistence, far-sightedness, dedication and also his versatility and the list goes on.

As a person who grew up during his premiership, I have been motivated and inspired by him. His love for people and his desire to help others can be traced back to the days when he was a doctor in Kedah and he built a sampan and used it to go to remote places to give medical treatment to people.

Unfortunately, he has also made us feel "uncomfortable" in recent years with his constant criticism of our leaders. People feel that he shouldn't be doing this at his level.

Geo-Strategic Front

- Cambodia

Cambodia has hit out at Google over what it called a "radically misleading" map of the disputed Thai-Cambodia border, accusing the world's biggest search engine of being "professionally irresponsible".

Thailand and Cambodia have been in a standoff in the disputed territory since 2008, with occasional gunfights claiming several lives. Thailand and Cambodia have been in a

standoff in the disputed territory since 2008, with occasional gunfights claiming several lives.

At Economic Front

- Indonesia

Indonesia's economy probably expanded at the fastest pace in a year in the fourth quarter as lower interest rates and government stimulus spurred consumer spending. Asian economies from China to Vietnam are picking up speed after policy makers boosted spending and cut borrowing costs to counter the global recession. Indonesia has fared better than its neighbors during the slump as it relies less on exports and consumer confidence has been buoyed by the most stable political climate since the ouster of former dictator Suharto in 1998.

- Philippine

Philippine inflation is likely to average just over 4.5 percent this year despite possible food supply tightness from an ongoing drought, the central bank said Friday. The figure is above the 3.2 percent average for 2009 and the December 2009 spike of 4.4 percent. "Based on potential near-term price movements, the current inflation outlook shows a hump-based path that could settle slightly above the middle of the 3.5 to 5.5 percent target range for 2010," it said in a report.

- Malaysia

There will be a master plan for the development of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) to ensure their growth is synchronised with the new economic model to be disclosed soon, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

The master plan, added Najib, would look into the needs of SMEs such as funding, capacity building and logistics support, as well as helping them explore export markets. The aim was to help the SMEs grow from just being small companies into more successful entities with the ability to capture local and global markets.

European countries, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, India and China are among Malaysia's focus markets for the export of services this year.

Malaysia External Trade Development Corp (Matrade) trade and promotion deputy chief executive officer Dr Wong Lai Sum said there were tremendous opportunities for Malaysians to export services to these places.

"This is especially in the area of outsourcing, professional and construction related services.

- Cambodia

OFFICIALS from Cambodia and Laos said Wednesday they were optimistic about the future of bilateral trade following a rise of 4 percent last year, despite the onset of the global economic crisis.

Official figures released by the Laos Embassy in Phnom Penh showed that trade between the two ASEAN neighbours remained very low, however, at just US\$274,780 in 2009 compared to \$264,180 the previous year.

At Social Front

- Indonesia

Indonesian lawmakers said Monday they found irregularities in the controversial 2008 bail-out of a minor bank. Members from the special parliamentary committee investigating PT Bank Century 710-million-dollar bail-out, said the bank's owners as well

as officials from the Finance Ministry and central bank were involved in the alleged crimes and called for a legal investigation. However, the legislators stopped short of naming specific individuals. The cash injection was condemned by government auditors and led to accusations of graft and illicit campaign financing.

President Yudhoyono has strongly denied any involvement, insisting the bail-out had been necessary to protect the economy from a crisis.

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said the country should enhance its role in ASEAN for national economic benefits ahead of its chairmanship of the group in 2013, China's Xinhua news agency reported, citing the Jakarta Post as saying on Wednesday.

"Our role in and contribution to ASEAN should not only be maintained but enhanced for the economic interest of Indonesia. We have to ensure that Indonesians can reap the benefits of ASEAN to increase their welfare," said Marty in his closing speech at a week-long meeting of ambassadors on Tuesday.

- Malaysia

The Court of Appeal will rule on Wednesday on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's application to quash his sodomy charge. Court of Appeal judge Justice Abu Samah Nordin, who headed a three-member bench, fixed the date after hearing submissions from Anwar's lead counsel Karpal Singh and lead prosecutor Solicitor-General II Datuk Mohd Yusof Zainal Abiden yesterday.

"We need time due to the lengthy submissions by both parties," remarked the judge, who sat with Justices Sulaiman Daud and Azhar @ Izhar Ma'ah. Anwar had last Dec 1 failed in his bid to strike out the sodomy charge against him, based on the ground that a medical report suggested there was no penetration.

More Filipino maids will be available from the end of next month if negotiations between authorities in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and recruitment agencies are successful. It may also be more affordable to hire maids from the region, as its Department of Labour and Employment will seek a "workable salary" that would be a win-win solution for both maid and employer, said ARMM state labour secretary Myra Mang-kabung-Alih.

Detailed News Monitoring Report

Summary Indonesia

- **Political front**
- **Indonesia, Islam and democracy: A perspective**

There are currently hundreds moderate Muslim organizations in Indonesia, many of them set up following the fall of President Soeharto in May 1998. The nurturing of these civic organizations may be as important to the future of Indonesia's democracy as is the curtailment of extremists.

Furthermore, simple political maturity, such as developing true parties with accountability and that stand for something beyond personality as well the development of an educated and experienced electorate should protect and stabilize Indonesia's democracy.

However, a critical component of Indonesia's democratic future involves recognition of the special role of Islam in the state.

As most Indonesian Muslims want their government to respect Islamic customs even if they do not support the creation of an Islamic state, the line between support for and opposition to sharia is often blurred.

Many Indonesians, including those who are only nominally Muslims, hold conservative values and support strict moral laws without necessarily seeing them as purely religious- or sharia-based.

It is easy to mistake support for a conservative moral law as support for Islamism when it is more simply a reflection of basic conservative values.

By the same token, many Muslims in Indonesia reject some social arrangements and norms that are commonly associated with democracy in the West, including our pluralism and secularism. But this too neither makes them theocrats nor anti-democratic.

While the political debate is often framed by pitting Islamists against non-Islamists, the lines are really much more subtle than this and democratic negotiation will require all parties to recognize this so that they can find common ground.

In this regard, Ahmad Shboul (2005) reminds us that keeping religion out of politics is not the same as keeping it out of society in general and that aside from the communists, even the most secular governments of the Western world have not attempted to do this.

Shboul suggests that the US attempts to secularize Arab politics may have even resulted in a backlash that has contributed to the growth of political Islam. Westerners would do well to remember that there is not only one form democratic society can take.

In fact, we do well to remember that even in the West, notions over what accrements democracy must have remains in flux and have changed over time.

As Hefner points out, whereas family was once seen as the central base of Western culture, today individual freedom is often elevated above family unity.

Additionally, the very notion of family is being redefined as Americans consider a variety of arrangements including domestic partnerships, civil unions, and gay marriage.

Despite our consensus on many central values there is constant stress in Western societies over the proper balance of individual right and needs of the community, equality and freedom, and even the proper role of religion and morality in politics.

Just as various Western democratic societies define each of these somewhat differently, Muslim democracies are likely to have their own brand of pluralism. The debate over the passage of sharia-based legislation reflects that Indonesia continues to map out the most central questions concerning the basic shape of its democracy.

The debate is less a debate about whether sharia is good or bad, but more about the proper meaning of sharia and its relationship to the state and thus its relationship to the national ideology of Pancasila.

Ultimately, it reflects a deep debate over the very meaning of the Indonesian nation and what it means to be Indonesian. All of us have multiple identities. We may define ourselves as students, scholars, husbands, wives, athletes, musicians from an array of images that form our composite selves.

However, for a nation state to succeed it is essential that one of the imbedded images that a country's inhabitants hold of themselves is that of their national identity.

But it is not enough to simply be an American, German, Indonesian or Turk, for a nation to function it is necessary that one's national identity represent some shared sense of community, and thus shared values. Most nations form out of a long history that creates a shared past. In most of Western Europe these shared histories have been bound together by common languages, religions and cultural norms.

Thus, while the Italians and French were both Catholics, the growing awareness of their differences became an expression of nationalism.

Indonesians similarly may share Islam with others across the globe, but Islam can fulfill only part of the nationalist vision. Of course this is especially true in light of the tens of millions of Indonesians who are not Muslims. The challenge for Indonesia is to find a place for sharia that neither subverts the uniqueness of Indonesia from rest of the Islam nor undermines non-Muslim Indonesians.

Indonesian Islamic scholarship has long and deep ties to the Middle East that form a strong bond with the rest of the Muslim world and recent decades have seen what is often called the Islamization or sometimes even the Arabization of Indonesia.

It would thus be a mistake to dismiss Indonesia as a worthy example of what the type of democratic society that Islam has produced even if it would be a mistake to assume that what can work in Indonesia could be exported to rest of the Islamic world.

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<http://www.iviews.com/Articles/articles.asp?ref=JP1002-4079>

- **Economic Front**
- **Indonesia's Economy Probably Expanded at Fastest Pace in a Year**

Indonesia's economy probably expanded at the fastest pace in a year in the fourth quarter as lower interest rates and government stimulus spurred consumer spending.

Asian economies from China to Vietnam are picking up speed after policy makers boosted spending and cut borrowing costs to counter the global recession. Indonesia has fared better than its neighbors during the slump as it relies less on exports and consumer confidence has been buoyed by the most stable political climate since the ouster of former dictator Suharto in 1998.

"For Indonesia, the risks have nothing to do with politics," Nikhil Srinivasan, who helps manage about \$30 billion as Singapore-based chief investment officer for Asia and the Middle East at Allianz Investment Management, said in an interview in Jakarta. "The only worry is making sure they push infrastructure so that growth can be more than 5 percent."

The Jakarta benchmark stock index increased 87 percent last year and the rupiah gained 16 percent, the best performance from an Asian currency outside Japan, as foreign funds sought to take advantage of Indonesia's strengthening economy.

"Investors have confidence in Indonesia," said Handy Yuinanto, a fixed-income analyst at PT Mandiri Sekuritas in Jakarta. "Indonesia has more positive stories."

Consumer Confidence

Growth in Indonesia's \$514 billion economy has been supported by rising consumer confidence, which according to a central bank index rose in January to near the five-year high recorded in July 2009 when President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was elected to a second term.

Yudhoyono, 60, has pledged to double spending on roads, seaports and airports to \$140 billion over the next five years, part of his push to deliver economic growth of at least 6.6 percent by the end of 2014.

Consumer spending is also benefitting from low inflation, said economists including Alexander Eric Sugandi from Standard Chartered Plc. in Jakarta. Inflation slowed to a decade low of 2.78 percent last year.

Indonesian car sales rose to 148,598 units in the fourth quarter from 140,585 a year earlier, according to data from Indonesia's Car Association. Sales may increase to between 550,000 and 600,000 this year from 486,061 in 2009, according to Joko Trisanyoto, PT Toyota Astra Motor's marketing director.

Rising Profits

PT Bank Rakyat Indonesia may report an increase of between 10 percent and 15 percent in net income for 2009, said Sudaryanto Sudargo, finance director of the bank, before a profit statement due to be released this quarter. The Jakarta-based bank had a profit of 5.9 trillion rupiah in 2008, according to Bloomberg data.

Indonesia's central bank cut its benchmark interest rate by 3 percentage points between December 2008 and August last year to shield the nation from the global recession. The country has since maintained its policy rate at 6.5 percent.

The Philippine economy expanded 1.8 percent in the fourth quarter of 2009 from a year earlier and China's gross domestic product increased 10.7 percent.

Indonesia's "economic upswing remains on track, with domestic demand leading the way," said Ashira Perera, an economist at Capital Economics Ltd. in London.

<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-02-09/indonesia-s-economy-probably-expanded-at-fastest-pace-in-a-year.html>

- **Indonesia's conservation areas affect 20 blocks**

Contractors operating in 20 oil and gas working areas may not be able to meet their exploration target as their blocks overlap onto protected areas, upstream regulator BP Migas reported.

"The development of several potential oil and gas reserves is being hampered because the areas overlap with forestry interests," BP Migas chairman Priyono said in a text message. He added this was holding back efforts to boost the country's oil and gas production, but declined to put a figure on the potential production losses due to the overlapping areas. BP Migas data shows such overlaps also occur in areas owned by major contractors, such as in the Warim working area and the Rebonjaro block in the Grissik working area, operated by US energy giant ConocoPhillips. The Warim working area runs over onto the Lorentz National Park in Papua, while the Rebonjaro block encroaches onto the Dangku Wildlife Reserve in South Sumatra.

Chevron Pacific Indonesia (CPI), the local arm of US-based Chevron, is experiencing the same issue in its Rokan working area, located in Riau province. The area overlaps with the Balai Raja Wildlife Reserve in the province.

State oil and gas company Pertamina also faces the same quandary in its Jambi Merang working area, which it operates jointly with Hess. The working area spills over into the Berbak National Park in Musi Banyuasin, South Sumatra. BP Migas says the overlaps have led to legal uncertainty and high costs for the contractors, adding the clear provision of land for the oil and gas industry should be seen as a vital national objective.

"BP Migas is currently discussing the matter with the Forestry Ministry," Priyono said.

Oil and gas has long been the backbone of the country's economy, contributing more than 30 % of the state budget. As of October, in a written report submitted to the House of Representatives Commission VII overseeing energy and mining, the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry stated that oil and gas sector revenue reached 67 % of this year's target of Rp 183.6 tn.

The sector booked Rp 124 tn (\$ 13.08 bn) revenue up to October. Last year, the sector contributed as much as Rp 304.38 tn or more than 30 % of the total state revenue.

However, Wirendro Sumargo, an executive director at Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI), said forest areas should not be sacrificed for what he called short-term economic interests.

"For long-term interests, forests must be protected," he said, adding the overlaps were brought about by poor coordination among government institutions, particularly the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry, the Forestry Ministry, and regional administrations. "Each institution works for its sector's interests only," Wirendro pointed out.

There are as many as 231 oil and gas contractors currently operating in Indonesia, with 63 of them having reached the production stage.

As of Aug. 17, the total average oil production for all contractors taken together has reached 950,000 barrels of oil per day or about 99 % of the oil lifting target set by the government.

<http://www.gasandoil.com/goc/company/cns100686.htm>

- **Parliament finds irregularities in Indonesia bank bail-out**

Indonesian lawmakers said Monday they found irregularities in the controversial 2008 bail-out of a minor bank. Members from the special parliamentary committee

investigating PT Bank Century 710-million-dollar bail-out, said the bank's owners as well as officials from the Finance Ministry and central bank were involved in the alleged crimes and called for a legal investigation. However, the legislators stopped short of naming specific individuals.

Members of the opposition said that Bank Indonesia failed to conduct proper oversight, allowing corruption and money laundering to occur and recommended a police investigation into the alleged crimes. Opposition lawmakers also told the hearing were indications of 'corruption' and banking 'irregularities' in the bail-out of Bank Century.

The opposition Golkar party said it found 59 irregularities in the bank's history, from prior to its formation in 2004 to the bail-out process.

But a member of the Democrat Party of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said he backed the decision of Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati and Vice President Boediono - then governor of the central bank - that the bail-out had been necessary.

The party blamed the central bank's weak supervision for allowing the merger of three ailing banks into Bank Century several years ago.

'In the end, this situation forced the government to bail out the bank in the midst of the global crisis in November 2008,' the lawmaker was quoted as saying by local media, adding that the 6.7-trillion-rupiah (710-million-dollar) bail-out was 'in line with the law and the principles of good governance.'

Boediono and Indrawati told the committee that if the bank had been allowed to fail at the height of the global downturn it would have had systemic impact on the country's banking industry.

The Supreme Audit Agency last year listed a number of irregularities linked to the bail-out process, for which the central bank failed to provide full information.

The emergency bail-out was enacted with a presidential decree. Politicians, however, later argued there was no legal basis for the rescue, particularly since most of the funds were injected after parliament had rejected a government regulation in lieu of law.

The cash injection was condemned by government auditors and led to accusations of graft and illicit campaign financing.

President Yudhoyono has strongly denied any involvement, insisting the bail-out had been necessary to protect the economy from a crisis.

http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/asiapacific/news/article_1531802.php/Parliament-finds-irregularities-in-Indonesia-bank-bail-out

- **Indonesia To Enhance Role In Asean For National Economic Interests**

Indonesia's Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said the country should enhance its role in ASEAN for national economic benefits ahead of its chairmanship of the group in 2013, China's Xinhua news agency reported, citing the Jakarta Post as saying on Wednesday.

"Our role in and contribution to ASEAN should not only be maintained but enhanced for the economic interest of Indonesia. We have to ensure that Indonesians can reap the benefits of ASEAN to increase their welfare," said Marty in his closing speech at a week-long meeting of ambassadors on Tuesday.

Marty said Jakarta has to translate political closeness with friendly partners into economic cooperation that would benefit people on both sides. "The global financial crisis teaches us a valuable lesson of not depending only on traditional markets," he said.

He also said that the country should also secure its political interests in the East Asia and Pacific region through the new regional architecture initiatives floated by Japan and Australia. The ambassadors' meeting gathered around 200 Indonesian diplomats from 119 embassies and consulate-generals around the world. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsworld.php?id=474929>

- **Social front**

Malaysia

- **Political Front**

- **Opposition in Perak gathers under 'democracy tree'**

Perak opposition leaders and members gathered under a tree they have dubbed "democracy tree" on the first anniversary of the collapse of the Pakatan Rakyat state government.

The visit was part of deposed Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin's northbound road trip, which included stops at Jelapang, Chemor, Sungai Siput, Kuala Kangsar, Padang Rengas, Taiping and Parit Buntar.

The southbound trip, which included stops at Batu Gajah, Gopeng, Kampar, Tapah, Slim River, Tanjung Malim and Teluk Intan, was led by Perak PKR chief Mustafa Kamil Ayub.

Perak DAP chairman Datuk Ngeh Koo Ham, who was not present during the gathering earlier, joined Mustafa's group at Batu Gajah.

Pakatan leaders handed out calendars, mandarin oranges and some ang pow to the people at several stops. Twenty-eight Pakatan assemblymen held an "emergency state assembly" under the tree at Medan Istana on March 3 after they were prevented from gaining entry into the state secretariat.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/7/nation/5630950&sec=nation>

- **EU Ambassador Impressed With 1Malaysia Concept**

The 1Malaysia concept coined by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak will play a pivotal role in steering Malaysians to move forward with a common purpose, thus creating a united country, Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Union to Malaysia, Vincent Picket said. He said he was impressed with the "1Malaysia" concept and that he hoped it would be successful in delivering the desired results.

"Any move towards a common purpose is good for this country and it's the same thing with the European Union.

"If the 1Malaysia concept really works, Malaysia's plural society is a strength and advantage that can help spur this country to greater heights," he said. Picket was in Sabah recently for a three-day official visit

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newsgeneral.php?id=475540>

- **DAP: 40% of Indians yet to register as voters**

SOME 40% of the Indian community have yet to be registered as voters, said DAP vice-president M. Kulasegaran.

He told Malaysia Namban he was surprised that so many Indians were not interested in voting. "Only those who register to vote have the opportunity to democratically choose the candidates they want to form the government," said the Ipoh Barat MP.

> The arts can be used as a bridge to strengthen solidarity among the races, said Information, Communications and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim as reported by Tamil Nesan.

This was in line with the 1Malaysia concept, he told reporters after launching the '1Malaysia Friendly Cultural Nite' organised by the Sungai Petani Barisan Nasional Youth in Sungei Petani on Saturday.

> Popular South Indian comedian Vadivelu has issued a legal notice to fellow comedian and friend Singamuthu, seeking RM25mil as damages for making wild allegations against him in an interview to a Tamil weekly recently, reported Makkal Osai.

Singamuthu in his interview, had alleged that Vadivelu was responsible for the recent death of his (Vadivelu's) servant and his manager. Other News & Views is compiled from the vernacular newspapers (Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese and Tamil dailies). As such, stories are grouped according to the respective language/medium. Where a paragraph begins with a > sign, it denotes a separate news item.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/11/nation/5656453&sec=nation>

- **Appeals court to decide on Anwar's application on Feb 17**

The Court of Appeal will rule on Wednesday on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's application to quash his sodomy charge. Court of Appeal judge Justice Abu Samah Nordin, who headed a three-member bench, fixed the date after hearing submissions from Anwar's lead counsel Karpal Singh and lead prosecutor Solicitor-General II Datuk Mohd Yusof Zainal Abiden yesterday.

"We need time due to the lengthy submissions by both parties," remarked the judge, who sat with Justices Sulaiman Daud and Azhar @ Izhar Ma'ah. Anwar had last Dec 1 failed in his bid to strike out the sodomy charge against him, based on the ground that a medical report suggested there was no penetration.

High Court judge Justice Mohamad Zabidin Mohd Diah had then ruled that the findings of a medical report could not be the basis for the court to quash the charge, saying the court should hear testimonies of the prosecution witnesses. The sodomy trial has been adjourned pending the outcome of an application by Anwar to recuse the trial judge.

The trial judge is scheduled to deliver his decision on the disqualification application on Feb 18. Anwar, 63, has claimed trial to sodomising his former personal aide Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan, 25, in Bukit Damansara on June 26, 2008.

Yesterday, Karpal contended that it would be the "divine duty" of the Court of Appeal to strike out the sodomy charge against Anwar although the trial had proceeded with the key witness testifying in court.

He said the appellate court should consider the medical report by three doctors from Hospital Kuala Lumpur which stated that there was "no conclusive clinical findings suggestive of penetration to the anus". "The legal meaning for conclusive is beyond reasonable doubt. In the face of findings like this, how could such a charge be allowed to proceed and culminate in trial and put Anwar in trauma as well as mental anguish for his family?" he asked. "Penetration is the fundamental element to be proven in a sodomy charge. The fundamental of the charge itself is thrown. For this alone, this court has to conclude that the charge is baseless," he said.

DPP Mohd Yusof submitted that the charge was proper and that the court should dismiss the appeal and enable evidence to be adduced in court through witnesses. "You can't look at the medical report and say insufficient evidence. The medical evidence is only

collaborative of what the author (doctor) wants to say," he said. He said the affidavit evidence (on the medical report) was not evidence, saying it only contained half the report and it would not be complete until the doctors and chemists testified in court about their findings.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/13/nation/5670573&sec=nation>

- **Crisis Shows Opposition Pact's Inability To Govern - Jamaluddin**

The political crisis occurring in states under Pakatan's rule is proof of the opposition pact's inability to govern, Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis said. He said that differences among opposition leaders, resulting in some of them leaving the party, showed weaknesses in the administration. "The don't have the agenda to help the people, only the agenda to criticise the government," he told reporters after opening the Rompin Umno convention at Universiti Tenaga Nasional in Muadzam Shah, near here on Saturday.

Jamaluddin, who is the Malaysian Ambassador to the United States and Rompin member of parliament, was commenting on the move by Bayan Baru MP Datuk Seri Zahrain Mohamed Hashim to quit Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) yesterday. Jamaluddin said he was not surprise by the development in the party as the leaders no longer had confidence in the leadership.

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v5/newspolitic.php?id=475601>

- **Economic Front**

- **PM: Move will look into needs of SMEs to ensure growth**

There will be a master plan for the development of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) to ensure their growth is synchronised with the new economic model to be disclosed soon, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

The master plan, added Najib, would look into the needs of SMEs such as funding, capacity building and logistics support, as well as helping them explore export markets. The aim was to help the SMEs grow from just being small companies into more successful entities with the ability to capture local and global markets.

Capturing the overseas markets does not mean just breaking new ground, but also improving on capability to meet the high quality requirements of the foreign demand.

"The master plan will focus on innovations, new technology and business processes and other aspects," he told a press conference after chairing the National Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council (NSDC) meeting here yesterday.

Najib said the council decided on the need for a master plan after seeing that SMEs made a 32% contribution to the GDP, with the sector recording an annual growth of 9.2% which was higher than the national GDP growth. The service sector had proven to be most successful among the SMEs while other areas like the agriculture and manufacturing sectors would need to be given more attention.

"We will also relook at the funding aspect and I want to advise those facing difficulties in securing loans for their SME businesses to seek the assistance of Bank Negara's counselling facility," he said. He said the International Trade and Industries Ministry would also be studying the funding needs of the SMEs but its plans would be announced later.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/13/nation/5669846&sec=nation>

- **Malaysia to focus on exporting services to Asia and Europe**

European countries, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, India and China are among Malaysia's focus markets for the export of services this year.

Malaysia External Trade Development Corp (Matrade) trade and promotion deputy chief executive officer Dr Wong Lai Sum said there were tremendous opportunities for Malaysians to export services to these places.

"This is especially in the area of outsourcing, professional and construction related services.

"In China, there is demand for water and wastewater treatment, information and communications technology (ICT) as well as engineering services," she told reporters after the opening of the Matrade-Austrade Seminar on exporting services yesterday.

Wong said Matrade had lined up a few missions for Malaysian companies seeking business opportunities in the countries mentioned. "Fifty percent of our missions this year is based on the services sector. This shows how serious we are towards the industry, which is expected to contribute 60% to the nation's gross domestic product by 2020," Wong said. She said this target was set under the Third Industrial Master Plan.

According to Wong, Malaysia's export of services last year surpassed imports, thanks to the government efforts in helping local companies go beyond the nation's borders. From January to September 2009, the total export of services recorded a value of RM72.71bil while imports were at RM69.06bil.

<http://biz.thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/11/business/5654587&sec=business>

- **HSBC sees strong growth in SME business**

HSBC Bank Malaysia Bhd is anticipating a stronger growth for its small and medium enterprise (SME) business this year compared with last year, buoyed by among others, its larger branch network's ability to service this segment.

Managing director for commercial banking David Morton said: "We are expecting at least a double digit growth for our SME business this year, and this will be better than last year." David Morton... "We are expecting at least a double digit growth for our SME business this year." However, he declined to divulge figures.

The bank is planning to establish a wider footprint by opening more branches, notably for its Islamic banking or HSBC Amanah.

"We opened four Islamic banking branches last year and will open two more probably by the first quarter of this year. We hope to have an additional six HSBC Amanah branches this year, bringing the total number to 10 by year-end," Morton said after a press briefing on HSBC's latest semi-annual Small Business Confidence Monitor survey here. The survey gauges the small businesses outlook in 20 markets worldwide. HSBC Bank currently has 40 conventional branches nationwide. Morton also said the higher level of confidence in SMEs as well as the bank's continuous investment in terms of capability and capacity in the Malaysian market would also boost the bank's SME business growth. The survey showed that confidence level among Malaysian SMEs climbed 24 points in the fourth quarter of last year from the fourth quarter of 2008.

It also revealed that 25% of SMEs in Malaysia said they planned to do international business by 2011, up from 15% which were already doing so, and a 67% increase from 2009. The top markets for Malaysian SMEs planning to expand their international operations are Indonesia, Singapore and Greater China.

On the outlook on capital expenditure, local SMEs were also more confident when it came to investing in their own businesses in the first half of this year – 28% of the local businesses (up six points from 22% in the second quarter of 2009) planned to increase their capital expenditure.

Unstable financial conditions such as fluctuating exchange rates and interest rates, and insufficient margins or profitability were cited by Malaysian SMEs as some of barriers to doing business internationally.

<http://biz.thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/11/business/5654504&sec=busines>

- **Social Front**

- **Malaysia court upholds ban on book on racial clash**

A court upheld Malaysia's ban on a book about 2001 racial clashes, ruling Friday that its publication could upset ethnic sensitivities already strained by recent attacks on places of worship.

The Kuala Lumpur High Court ruled that the Home Ministry was correct to issue the ban three years ago on "March 8," written by Malaysian author K. Arumugam, which recounts clashes between ethnic Malay Muslims and ethnic Indians. The strife killed six people on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur in 2001.

Nearly two-thirds of Malaysia's 28 million people are Malays. The government carefully manages ethnic relations between Malays and the large Chinese and Indian minorities, while promoting the country as a model of racial harmony.

High Court Judge Mohamad Ariff Mohamad Yusof said the book ban was justified "based on public order grounds," according to Edmund Bon, a lawyer representing Arumugam, who sued to overturn the ban.

The lawyer said the judge did not elaborate on his misgivings about the book. "March 8" is based on eyewitness accounts and academic research. Some 3,000 copies were sold within six months of its publication before it was banned in late 2006, Bon said.

The verdict sends a wrong message "that Malaysian society is still incapable of discussing important issues of race and religion deemed explosive," Bon said Friday, adding that his team had not decided whether to appeal the decision.

The Home Ministry regularly reviews books and has banned dozens in the past few years, often because they contained too much sexual content or were deemed to misrepresent Islam, Malaysia's official religion.

Officials blamed the violence in 2001 on various factors, including criminal gangs and frustration caused by poverty, but some residents have said it was also triggered by racially related arguments.

It was the most deadly racial clash since 1969, when riots involving Malays and Chinese took at least 200 lives.

Last month, firebomb attacks and vandalism targeted 11 churches, a Sikh temple, three mosques and two Muslim prayer rooms. The attacks - which mostly caused minor damage and have since subsided - initially hit churches after some Muslims were upset over a court ruling that allowed Christians to use the word "Allah" to refer to God in the Malay language.

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/A/AS_MALAYSIA_BOOK_BAN?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2010-02-12-03-53-41

- **Uncomfortable with Dr M's criticism**

FORMER Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is a living legend of our nation and also a world renowned figure. He has been an inspiration for so many of us. He has attracted us in so many of his ways, from intelligence, persistence, far-sightedness, dedication and also his versatility and the list goes on.

As a person who grew up during his premiership, I have been motivated and inspired by him. His love for people and his desire to help others can be traced back to the days when he was a doctor in Kedah and he built a sampan and used it to go to remote places to give medical treatment to people.

Unfortunately, he has also made us feel "uncomfortable" in recent years with his constant criticism of our leaders. People feel that he shouldn't be doing this at his level.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/12/focus/5652471&sec=focus>

- **Najib wishes Malaysian Chinese a happy new year**

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today wished Malaysian Chinese a very happy Chinese New Year and hoped all Malaysians would look ahead with greater optimism and resolve to build a stronger and more dynamic Malaysia.

"This is an opportunity for all of us, in the Year of the Tiger, to reflect on personal achievements, shortcomings and challenges and resolve to become better individuals and better Malaysians in the year ahead." Open houses will be held to mark the beginning of the lunar New Year and in keeping with the Malaysia spirit, I encourage every Malaysian to join in the celebrations, visit your Chinese friends and be part of the festivities to mark this auspicious day with your fellow citizens," he said in his Chinese New Year message.

And, as has been the tradition for centuries, Malaysians of Chinese descent would strengthen family ties with reunion dinners, pay homage to senior citizens and renew friendships, noted the prime minister.

"We must be bold and more courageous in getting to know our neighbours better and be more dynamic and committed in the workplace, so as to contribute to the betterment of society and the country," he added.

According to the Chinese zodiac, the tiger symbolised courage, optimism and dynamism, Najib said, adding that those born in that year were natural leaders, brave, strong and daring.

Meanwhile, MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat, while wishing all Malaysian Chinese a happy Chinese New Year, hoped Malaysians of other races could share the joy of celebrating the Lunar New Year, in the spirit of Malaysia.

"The upcoming lunar year is the Year of the Golden Tiger. The tiger is a symbol associated with speed of thought and sharpness in action. It is also a symbol of passion, courage and generosity.

"It seems to me a perfect year for transformative change. Like the tiger feline, may we always land on our feet," he said in a statement, in conjunction with the lunar new year, which will be celebrated by the Chinese community tomorrow.

Ong, who is also transport minister, wished those returning home for the celebrations, a safe journey. He urged them to be patient, careful and adhere to traffic rules. MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the Year of the Tiger would give a "roaring start" for Malaysia's economy to fully recover from last year's economic slowdown.

People's Progressive Party president Datuk M. Kayveas hoped the Chinese community would strive to further strengthen relations among the various races. In his Chinese New

Year message, he said the peace and harmony enjoyed by the country should be further nurtured for its betterment.

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam urged the people of various races to strengthen unity and build a strong society towards achieving 1Malaysia.

He said unity, spirit of friendship and tolerance were crucial for the country's progress.

"We should take every opportunity to further strengthen this," he said in his Chinese New Year message. Social activist Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, a trustee of the 1Malaysia Foundation, said other races should also join in the Chinese New Year celebrations through the concept of open houses to adopt the spirit of 1Malaysia.

He reminded Malaysians that racial harmony and unity should never be taken for granted as shown by recent events affecting religious harmony.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/13/nation/20100213195438&sec=nation>
on

- **Talks to bring in maids from Mindanao**

More Filipino maids will be available from the end of next month if negotiations between authorities in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and recruitment agencies are successful. It may also be more affordable to hire maids from the region, as its Department of Labour and Employment will seek a "workable salary" that would be a win-win solution for both maid and employer, said ARMM state labour secretary Myra Mang-kabung-Alih.

"Such an agreement will create employment opportunities in the region. "We may be able to work out a lower rate due to the economic recession," she said, adding that the region was one of the poorest in the country.

On Wednesday, a group of 20 Malaysian maid agencies signed a memorandum of understanding with the department for it to negotiate with recruitment agencies in ARMM to send a targeted 500 maids here monthly. The initiative will bring the take-up rate of Filipino maids from around 200 a month currently to 700.

"We are doing our best to cater for the shortage of supply of maids due to the current situation in the industry," said Datuk Raja Zulkepley Dahalan, the former Association of Foreign Maid Agencies chairman who led the group, called G20.

Last June, the Indonesian Government froze the supply of maids to Malaysia after numerous complaints of maid abuse.

Filipino maids are now paid US\$400 (RM1,372) monthly, following the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration's decision in October 2006 to standardise the minimum salary of Filipino household workers deployed overseas. Currently, there are 10,000 registered Filipino maids in Malaysia.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/7/nation/5631960&sec=nation>

- **Environmental Front**
- **Is Malaysia a haven for wildlife – or hell?**

The January edition of the prestigious National Geographic highlighted the enormous scale of wildlife trafficking, both legal and blatantly illegal, perpetuated in and transited through Malaysia.

The Malaysian Government clearly needs to decide if it wishes to retain its popular and lucrative wildlife dependant eco-tourism industry employing many thousands, or permit a relatively few unscrupulous wildlife traders and officials to tarnish the country's image irrevocably.

Malaysia has undeniably become the entry and exit point for millions of animals, some legally, many not. The Government needs quickly to decide if it wants Malaysia to be seen as a haven for wildlife – or hell. It cannot be both.

<http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2010/2/11/focus/5652369&sec=focus>

Philippine

- **Political Front**
- **One more killed in poll-related violence in Philippines**

A man was shot dead after he tried to grab a gun belonging to escorts of a poll candidate in Davao City in southern Philippines late on Thursday night, a radio report said on Friday.

Kamendan Tamano Kagi allegedly grabbed the gun of one of the escorts of gubernatorial candidate Esmael "Toto" Mangudadatu at J.S. Gaisano City Mall in Illustre, Davao City, Senior Superintendent Rene Espero, Davao City Police Office chief said in a radio interview.

Kagi aimed the gun at Mangungudatu, but two bodyguards intervened, ran after and shot the attacker, Espero said, adding that Kagi was the 65th to have been killed in elections-related violence in the run-up to the May 10 polls.

Mangungudatu escaped death. He belongs to an influential Filipino-Muslim clan whose wife and sister were among 57 people, including women lawyers, followers, and journalists who were massacred by political rival Andal Ampatuan, in Maguindanao last November 23.

Suspected

Kagi was also suspected of trying to abduct Mangudadatu's daughter. That claim is being investigated, the police chief said. Ampatuan, former town mayor of Datu Unsay in the south, and Mangudadatu, vice mayor of Buluan, also in the south, wanted to run as governor of Maguindanao in the May 10 elections. The young Ampatuan is on trial in Manila for the murders.

His father, Andal Ampatuan Sr., was also arrested for alleged involvement in last year's killing. Meanwhile, Mangudadatu's bodyguards were placed under police custody for the shooting incident. They were brought to the prosecutor's office in Davao City on Friday morning. Kagi, a former member of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit, was also the bodyguard of Ampatuan Sr., investigators said. Elections in the Philippines are often marred by clashes among influential political rivals.

<http://gulfnnews.com/news/world/philippines/one-more-killed-in-poll-related-violence-in-philippines-1.582031>

- **Initial report on the mock elections in New Era Elementary School, Quezon City**

The preparation of the election paraphernalia proceeded smoothly, except for the difficulty of having many interested observers who could not have immediate access to the polling center. The number of observers was limited, and most of them could only watch through the window. They could not see the actual operation of the machines.

There were 50 pre-selected voters, most of whom were teachers who will act as Board of Election Inspectors (BEI) on Election Day. Initial reports say that 40 of the voters were teachers. Thus, the idea of testing the system using a wide range of sectors with different levels of understanding was not considered. The teachers reportedly already had a dry-run a day before the actual mock elections.

Since they were pre-selected voters, they did not go through the possibly time-consuming process of looking up one's name in the voters list. Interviews done after the voting indicated that some of the teachers were not even voters of the said precinct and were just asked to fill-in slots for the mock elections.

Ten voters at a time were allowed inside the polling precinct. They were given mock ballots that included bands and heroes instead of the names of real candidates.

The average time it took one voter to finish the process was about 5-6 minutes. It may appear fast but we have to remember that the voters were mainly teachers who had been given prior briefings. Also, based on our interviews with the voters, they were not really spending time looking for the names of particular candidates. One Comelec officer in charge of the mock polls admitted that looking up the name of a real candidate/party-list from several hundred names may take more time than just randomly voting for mock candidates. Total time for the 50 voters to finish the process was an hour and 50 minutes, but there were some understandable delays (absence of ground rules for media coverage, physical arrangement of the classroom etc).

All things considered, it would really take more time for 50 people to vote, if we are to factor in looking up one's name in the voters' list and actually looking up the names of real candidates from the 25-inch-long ballot. The average time for a voter may exceed the 6 minutes we saw today (February 6). A real time and motion study must be conducted by the Comelec.

At this rate, there may not be enough time to allow 1,000 voters per precinct to vote. If 50 voters will need 110 minutes to vote, that would mean 36 hours for 1,000 people to vote. If we speed up the rate, say 1 hour for 50 voters, that would still result to 20 hours for 1,000 people to vote. If we go by a 75% voter turnout, that would still require some 15 hours for 750 people to vote.

Interviews also indicated that some pens ran out of ink. Other voters complained of the font size. One voter was about to use her ballpen to fill up the ballot until a Comelec official saw her and gave her the official felt-tip pen.

Rejection of ballot

The New Era Precinct Count Optical Scan (PCOS) machine rejected some five mock ballots. After several failed attempts to read the ballots, they were placed in an envelope and set aside. The voters however were not informed of the reason for the rejection of ballots. They were not given a second ballot nor were they allowed to correct whatever defect that may have been present in the rejected ballot.

At the end of the voting, a Smartmatic personnel explained that the reason why the ballots were rejected was that they were not sufficiently marked, or did not meet the marking threshold (some only showed dots instead of shades). He explained that the ballots contained "ambiguous marks". Kontra Daya was able to see only one of these ballots that allegedly had "ambiguous marks". The Comelec refused to let us see the rest of the rejected ballots. We also did not see the screen on the machine which said that the ballots contained "ambiguous marks".

The Smartmatic technician explained that by fully shading the ballot, the machine will accept the previously rejected ballot. This was demonstrated to the audience in the room. Kontra Daya raised the issue that the BEI did not inform the voters of the reason/s why their ballots were rejected and did not advise the voters what they can do, or if they can vote again. There appears to be no guidelines covering this scenario. We fear this is a

major issue that Comelec should address now considering that this is not the first test where ballots were rejected. Similar incidents happened in Aguho Elementary School in Pateros last January 29. It is time that guidelines be set to cover rejected ballots and the voter's options.

Transmission

There were no major transmission problems except for the difficulty in transmitting to the KBP server which took four attempts.

Kontra Daya received reports from other areas that there were not enough voters for the mock polls. Also, there were machine glitches in Maharlika Elementary School in Taguig, including the jamming of paper and the opening of the PCOS machine.

There should be another round of mock elections to further test the system and to test the guidelines covering rejected ballots. The next round should involve a broader cross-section of society (not just teachers) and must simulate closer-to-actual conditions, including the new ballot format, the actual voters' list, and even an actual manual audit of votes.

We also cannot underscore enough the importance of voters education which the Comelec should be conducting to inform voters of the new system.

One of our greatest fears is that if these issues are not addressed in time for May 10, then we are headed for a trouble-filled election day. with many disenfranchised voters. `

<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/views-and-analysis/02/06/10/mock-polls-still-not-satisfactory>

- **Economic Front**

- **Manila Water, Indian firm to form joint venture**

MANILA Water Co. Inc. said it signed a joint venture agreement with an Indian company to look into supply and wastewater services in three states in that South Asian country.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, Manila Water, which holds the supply and wastewater services concession to half of Metro Manila, said the agreement with Jindal Water Infrastructure Ltd. (JWIL) stipulates that both companies would develop new businesses in the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharsashtra.

Manila Water said it would form a joint-venture company (JVC) with JWIL "as a vehicle for the planning and development of projects in the aforementioned states in India."

"Key management officers of both parties shall compose the JVC's Management and Project Team, where business development initiatives shall be carried out through a pre-agreed development budget," the Philippine water utility firm said.

It said the New Delhi-headquartered JWIL forms part of the O P Jindal Group, which is one of India's biggest companies, and was established "to focus on designing sustainable and innovative solutions in water and wastewater management."

Manila Water said the tie up with JWIL would enable both companies to build "a regional presence in India."

Manila Water's stock ended Monday at P15.25 a share, down 25 centavos from Friday's close. It had been trading between a low of P15 and a high of P15.75 since the start of the 2010.

On February 4, the company said it had received a letter dated January 7 from state-run Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), penalizing the water utility allegedly discharging wastewater into the lake.

LLDA has fined Manila Water P1,000 a day starting November 18, 2009 until the company stops releasing the wastewater.

Majority owned by the Ayala group, Manila Water said it was preparing legal and other courses of action to question the regulator's penalty. Last year, the company acquired AAA Water Corp., which owns 70 percent of Laguna AAA Water Corp., a joint venture between the former and the provincial government of Laguna.

The joint venture has a 25-year water and wastewater concession starting 2007 in the city of Santa Rosa and the municipalities of Binan and Cabuyao in the said province.

<http://www.manilatimes.net/index.php/business-columns/11142-manila-water-indian-firm-to-form-joint-venture>

- **Philippines expects inflation of 4.5%**

Philippine inflation is likely to average just over 4.5 percent this year despite possible food supply tightness from an ongoing drought, the central bank said Friday.

The figure is above the 3.2 percent average for 2009 and the December 2009 spike of 4.4 percent. "Based on potential near-term price movements, the current inflation outlook shows a hump-based path that could settle slightly above the middle of the 3.5 to 5.5 percent target range for 2010," it said in a report.

"Supply tightness in key agricultural products and the pending adjustments in domestic power charges" were potential causes of the higher inflation rate, it said.

"The impact of the El Nino weather conditions (drought) on domestic food supply could also add some pressure on inflation in the near term." For 2011 the average could be "at the lower half of the 3.0-5.0 percent target range," it added.

The monetary authority, which has kept an accommodative policy to induce growth amid a global crisis, said a stronger global recovery, the impact of the US dollar's movement on commodity prices, as well as weather conditions could all cause an "upward shift in the inflation path."

Manila is targetting economic growth of between 2.6 and 3.6 percent this year from an 11-year low of 0.9 percent in 2009. afp

http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\02\13\story_13-2-2010_pg5_37

- **Social Front**

- **Three communist rebels killed in clashes in Philippines**

Three communist rebels were killed Friday in two separate clashes with government troops in the Philippines, military and police reports said. Two guerrillas were killed in a clash with patrolling troops in Manapla town in Negros Occidental province, 480 kilometres south of Manila, according to a police report.

There were no casualties on the government side. Another guerrilla was killed before dawn when government troops overran a rebel encampment in Buenavista town in Agusan del Norte province, 816 kilometres south of Manila.

One soldier was wounded in fighting in Guinabsan village that lasted for more than two hours before the guerrillas abandoned their camp, a military report said. The clashes occurred as the military vowed to comply with a Supreme Court order to bring to court 43 health workers arrested last week on suspicion of being communist guerrillas.

The health workers were arrested Saturday while attending a seminar in a resort in Morong town, Rizal province, 45 kilometres east of Manila. The military said assorted explosive materials, hand grenades, improvised landmines and handguns were seized from the group of 17 men and 26 women.

The police and military said they have witnesses who can identify the suspects as members of the New People's Army, the armed-wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Communist rebels have been fighting the Philippine government since the late 1960s, making the movement one of the longest-running leftist insurgencies.

http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/asiapacific/news/article_1532995.php/Three-communist-rebels-killed-in-clashes-in-Philippines

- **Environmental front**

Thailand

- **Political Front**
- **Will voters come to the Democrats' party?**

The proposed meeting between Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and the leaders of his Democrat Party's coalition partners at the 55th birthday celebration for Suwat Liptapanlop on Monday failed to take place. Big bosses Newin Chidchob, Banharn Silpa-archa and Phinij Jarusombat declined to attend the event, citing prior commitments, a Thai Rath writer said.

Khunying Sudarat Keyuraphan and Chalerm Yubamrung put their heads together at a panel discussion in August, 2007, on the future of politics. The two, should they get together, are now more likely to discuss their different visions for the Puea Thai Party.

The writer suggested the absence of the coalition partners might indicate they are still miffed with the Democrat Party's refusal to agree with the five coalition parties to amend the constitution from multi-MP to single-MP constituencies as the Democrat Party believed the present constitution favoured larger political parties such as the Democrats and Puea Thai over smaller and medium-size parties.

It was useless for the other coalition bosses to attend the meeting with Mr Abhisit as he was bound by the Democrat Party's resolution not to amend the constitution and could not go along with the coalition partners' demands.

As if to emphasise the Democrat Party's stance, Mr Abhisit remarked at the weekend that the party was hoping to win more than 240 seats in the next general election and thus govern alone without the existing coalition parties for support.

The confidence shown by Mr Abhisit has caused anxiety among coalition partners. They fear they may be abandoned in a future government. However, it is unlikely that the five coalition partners would dare to challenge the Democrat Party right now as they still want to be part of the government until the next general election. The main reason for this is that they want to enjoy the money being spent under the Thai Khem Khaeng stimulus package to replenish their war chest before contesting the next election.

However, it is possible that the coalition might not last its full four-year term as the Democrat Party is doing everything it can to win the hearts and minds of the electorate while trying to block coalition partners from gaining an advantage.

The latest selling point is the approval of 12 railway lines in Bangkok and its perimeters, as proposed by the Office of the Commission for the Management of Road Traffic chaired by Mr Abhisit. The master plan envisions a total investment of 800 billion baht over the next 20 years.

Political observers say Bangkokians will be won over if a solution is found to the protracted traffic problems. The building of more roads or expressways is not seen as feasible.

Apart from the 12 railway lines, new Deputy Prime Minister Trairong Suwannakhiri has revived the idea of more railway projects across the country, and a southern land bridge linking the Indian and Pacific oceans across Thailand's South. All of these projects are deemed electoral winners.

But Mr Trairong also said the 34 billion baht "dust-free" roads project was now not a priority as the economy was picking up and it might be hard to justify borrowing heavily to finance projects that might not contribute significantly to the national economy. The road project supported by the Bhumjaithai Party comes under the Thai Khem Khaeng stimulus spending.

Bhumjaithai leader and Interior Minister Chavarat Charnvirakul immediately objected, saying that if the party's dust-free roads project was cancelled, other stimulus spending programmes must be cancelled as well. Mr Abhisit has not yet cancelled the project and will hold talks with Transport Minister Sohpon Zarum on whether it would be possible to shift the project from the Thai Khem Khaeng package to the regular annual budget.

The Thai Rath writer wondered how long the coalition partners could tolerate the antics of the Democrat Party before they throw their lot in with the Puea Thai Party. The only obstacle is the signal from the military that they must continue to support the Democrat Party if they still want a stage on which to play politics, concluded Thai Rath.

Thaksin stuck with junk stocks

While the Puea Thai Party predicted that the coalition government would not last long, stating there was internal strife within the Democrat Party and between the Democrats and its coalition partners on the issue of amending the constitution, Nongnuch Singhadecha, a Matichon writer, said all was not well and good in the opposition camp either.

Internal strife erupted within the Puea Thai Party last week when veteran politician and chief of the Puea Thai MPs Chalerm Yubamrung criticised Khunying Sudarat Keyuraphan, alleging she was behind the strife in the party.

"I have tolerated [Khunying Sudarat] for a long time out of respect for Thaksin Shinawatra and Khunying Potjaman," Mr Chalerm said during the party's meeting on Feb 2. "But when I yielded a little, it was as if I were under her thumb.

"When did Khunying Sudarat ever debate any substantial issue in parliament in her entire political career? These people were cats but when they got a little support from Thaksin, they thought they were tigers."

Nongnuch noted that several factions in Puea Thai were competing to become Thaksin's most trusted lieutenants so as to gain power in the party.

Meanwhile, within the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship circle, there now appears to be two main factions, not including several small, fragmented groups, vying for leadership. The first and original faction comprises the three comrade leaders, Jatuporn Prompan, Veera Musikhapong and Natthawut Saikua. The newly emerged faction comprises Maj Gen Khattiya Sawasdiapol and Gen Panlop Pinmanee, former deputy director of the Internal Security Operation Command, who shifted his alliance from the yellow shirts led by his friend Maj Gen Chamlong Srimuang to the red shirts camp two years ago.

The struggle for power within the red shirt movement between the old and new factions emerged publicly last week when Gen Panlop announced that the red shirts would organise a "people's army" to fight against aristocratic rule and would invite the former

prime minister and army commander in chief, and now Puea Thai chairman, Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, to lead it. Gen Chavalit declined the invitation, saying there is only one army under His Majesty the King.

The announcement of the people's army idea came about after Gen Panlop, Maj Gen Khattiya, Arisman Pongruengrong and Suporn Atthawong flew to Dubai to meet with Thaksin on Feb 1.

Gen Panlop and Maj Gen Khattiya are well known to Thai people as military men who favour force to settle issues. Gen Panlop was the classmate of Maj Gen Chamlong and initially supported the yellow shirts as he looked on Chamlong as a friend. Gen Panlop changed his support when he was disappointed at not being named the second generation leader of the yellow shirt movement because the first generation leaders opposed his idea to use force to drive then prime minister Somchai Wongsawat out of office. He then flew to meet Thaksin in China at the end of 2007 to pledge his allegiance.

Maj Gen Khattiya has been a Thaksin man from the beginning. He was assigned to train and provide security for the red shirt movement. He was often quoted uttering disparaging remarks against his superiors and fellow military officers whom he deemed to be on the opposite side of the political fence.

Several political observers have remarked that one should not underestimate Thaksin as he has several cards up his sleeve. Nongnuch thought Thaksin's strategy was similar to that of stock market punters who believe in investing in as many stocks as possible to minimise risks.

However, one of the richest men in the world, Warren Buffett, does not agree with that strategy, believing that investing in too many stocks distracts the necessary attention to keep up with the performance of individual stocks. Mr Buffet has said he would rather focus his investment on a few selected stocks that he and his team have studied in depth. Mr Buffet is thus characterised as a "value investor" who emphasises only a few stocks with sound fundamentals which can easily ride out the fluctuations of the market.

Nongnuch believes Thaksin likes to invest in several stocks without studying thoroughly which stock is the most fundamentally sound. Thus Thaksin is deemed to hold several junk stocks in his political portfolio, as can be seen in the struggles for power within the red shirt movement and the Puea Thai Party, concluded Matichon.

Miscellany

The government is investigating reports of unexplained flows of money from abroad amid suspicions it could be used to stir up violence before the Feb 26 verdict in Thaksin's assets case.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said the government "has received reports [about irregular flows of funds from overseas] and we are verifying them". The flow of money appeared to confirm his earlier prediction that political activity this month would intensify. Acting government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn said the government was obliged under the national security law to investigate any irregular flows of funds from overseas.

He said the reports of money coming from such places as the Middle East and elsewhere in Asia came from several sources, including members of the Senate. "Unusual amounts of funds have been transferred into the country since late last year," Mr Panitan said. "Maybe it is part of the economic recovery, but we have to verify the sources and the purposes of these funds." Chawengsak Thongsaluay, a close aide to Puea Thai Party

chairman Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, denied rumours Gen Chavalit had received money from abroad to fund the red shirt movement.

The allegations were also denied by red shirt leaders including Jatuporn Prompan and Puea Thai Party MP Apinan Wiriyachai, who challenged the government to produce evidence of any financial links between Thaksin and the red shirt leaders.

A United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship source said Thaksin wanted to see a major rally held before Feb 26 and had told MPs to help mobilise people to join the demonstration.

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/32823/will-voters-come-to-the-democrats-party>

- **Thailand's anti-govt red-shirt leaders ready for million-man march**

In order to pool together a million people to take part in their anti-government rally later this month, Thailand's anti-government red-shirt movement and the opposition Pheu Thai Party are making moves to mobilise masses across the country, an informed source said on Thursday (February 11).

At a meeting on Thursday, leaders of the Democratic Alliance against Dictatorship (DAAD) appeared to have differences over several key issues, including the date for the rally - on whether it should be held before the verdict is read out on former Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra's assets-seizure case on February 26. But both sides finally decided to hold the protests on February 20. DAAD leaders Veera Musigapong, Nattawut Saikua and Jatuporn Promphan reportedly wanted the rally to be held before February 26 to preempt the first strike, while Weng Tojirakarn and Nit Sinthuphrai wanted it to be held the day after to avoid criticism that the red-shirt movement was established to serve Thaksin. February 26 is the day when Thailand's Supreme Court will announce whether the state can seize US\$2.2 billion worth of Thaksin's assets which was frozen by the military-appointed government following his ouster in late 2006.

Local DAAD organisers reported that red-shirt protesters nationwide were ready to converge as soon as they get the green light from leaders. The protesters are further prepared because they've all "graduated" from the network of "red-shirt schools" organised by the DAAD.

There are 459 of these so-called red-shirt schools across the country, with 107 in the Northeast, 100 in the North, 80 in Central, 14 in the South and 158 in the capital.

Of the million protesters, 70 per cent will come from the provinces and the remainder from Bangkok and its outskirts. The red-shirts from the provinces are expected to arrive in the capital one week before D-Day, when they will be joined by their Bangkok-based counterparts.

Red-shirt leaders and Bangkok Pheu Thai MPs have each been given the job of bringing in 10,000 to 20,000 protesters, while each of the 459 red-shirt schools will be providing between 1,000 and 2,000 people, the sources explained.

Meanwhile, PM's secretary general Korbsak Sabhavasus said on Thursday that relevant state agencies had been instructed to ensure round-the-clock surveillance in Bangkok, particularly in areas where the homes of important figures are located.

He added that more lights and security cameras would be installed in risky areas - a security revamp that would require funding of "just slightly more than 900,000 baht (US\$27,132)".

Proprietors of high-rises in the risky areas would also be asked to install security cameras and maintain lists of building tenants and visitors, Korbsak added.

He said these measures were discussed during a meeting with senior police officers at the Government House on Wednesday.

In a related development, National Anti-Corruption Commission secretary-general Apinan Israngura na Ayuthaya said he is ready to explain why the agency had not yet completed the cases against the pro-government yellow shirts when the red-shirt protesters gather at the NACC office on Friday (February 12).

He said some 150 policemen would guard the agency's office during the protest and important documents related to NACC cases would be put in a safe place.

However, Apinan said he did not think there would be any violent incidents during the protest, because the red shirts were peaceful when protesting at the Office of the Attorney-General and the Royal Thai Police headquarters earlier this week.

He said all the nine NACC members would come to work as usual on Friday and be regularly updated about the situation.

<http://www.asianewsnet.net/news.php?id=10048&sec=1>

- **Thailand won't give up disputed area**

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva on Monday stood firm that his government would not give up the contested 1.8 square miles (4.6 sq km) area adjacent to the ancient Preah Vihear temple to Cambodia, saying the area which is owned by Thailand must belong to the kingdom.

He said the government would send a letter asking the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)'s World Heritage Committee to review the map which Cambodia earlier submitted to it and would give a Thai opinion to the UNESCO committee.

The World Heritage Committee will soon meet to consider Cambodia's application to list the ancient temple and its surrounding areas contested by the two neighbouring countries as a World Heritage site.

Mr Abhisit said Cambodia has been trying to acquire the area for two years but his government would not budge and would not accept any disputed map submitted by the neighbouring country.

The International Court of Justice ruled in 1962 that Preah Vihear temple belongs to Cambodia, but Thailand holds that the 1.8 square miles (4.6 sq km) area surrounding the ancient temple belongs to Thailand.

Border demarcation in the area remains unresolved and sporadic clashes have occurred recently. The Thai prime minister said the Thai-Cambodia border has returned to normal after Mr Hun Sen cancelled his planned visit to Ta Muen Thom temple ruins in Thailand's northeastern province of Surin.

He also shrugged off reports that Cambodia has changed the name of the village opposite Ta Muen Thom ruins as Ta Muen Village, saying the matter will not cause any misunderstanding nor confusion as Thailand can prove that the area belongs to the kingdom.

Meanwhile, hundreds of protesters led by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) or the Yellow Shirts have dispersed after receiving confirmation that Mr Hun Sen had cancelled his planned visit and returned to Phnom Penh. The PAD leaders said they have successfully put pressures and force the Cambodian leader not to enter into Thai soil.

Thai military personnel remain stationed at the Ta Muen Thom ruins and are closely monitoring Cambodian military movements. The area has been declared a restricted zone as the situation is considered risky. (TNA)

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/167876/thailand-won-t-give-up-disputed-area>

- **Economic Front**

- **Manila may buy more rice, nears deal with Thailand**

The Philippines is looking at importing more rice this year as dry weather threatens output, a senior government official said yesterday, potentially lifting its purchases to a record level. The Philippines says it could lose more than 800,000 tonnes of paddy rice from a severe drought caused by El Nino. The additional imports may come from Thailand, the world's largest exporter of the grain, with Manila and Bangkok close to a five-year deal for an annual supply of 367,000 tonnes, another official said.

The Philippines, the world's largest rice buyer, has so far contracted to buy 2.25 million tonnes of the national staple, mostly from Vietnam.

Total imports, excluding the tariff-free deal with Thailand, could reach a record 2.4 million tonnes if private firms take up a government offer to bring in 163,000 tonnes under the Philippines' annual country-specific quota.

Asked if the country's rice imports for 2010 would increase further, Agriculture Undersecretary Bernardo Fondevilla told reporters: 'It's possible.' He said an inter-agency panel was studying the country's import needs for the year in the face of a dry spell.

Officials have said they expect a moderate El Nino to hit the country in the first half of the year. In its latest monthly El Nino report, the weather bureau said it has monitored at least one province experiencing drought in the central Philippines, while other areas, including rice-growing provinces on the main island of Luzon, were having dry spells.

The Philippines said last week it could lose more than 800,000 tonnes of paddy rice from a severe drought caused by El Nino, the abnormal warming of waters in the equatorial Pacific. The country has forecast unmilled rice output to drop 1.7 per cent to 7.25 million tonnes in the first half of 2010.

The Southeast Asian country lost 1.3 million tonnes of paddy last year after heavy storms ravaged crops in September and October, forcing it to advance 2010 purchases.

Manila's almost weekly rice tenders in December pushed up rice prices, but these have since eased and are expected to fall further as big producers like Thailand and Vietnam begin harvesting.

Thailand's benchmark 100 per cent B-grade white rice dropped to US\$575 a tonne this week from US\$580 last week.

With bulging stocks and a new crop coming in, Thailand is under pressure to sell its rice. Bangkok's attempt to unload 375,000 tonnes via a tender last month failed, following unacceptably low bids.

The Philippines has offered to buy 367,000 tonnes from Thailand and a final agreement is likely to be signed at the Asean economic ministers' meeting in Malaysia by the end of February, said Ramon Vicente Kabigting, assistant secretary at the Department of Trade and Industry. 'We have sent it already to Thailand. We hope they will be willing to sign it during the Asean meeting,' he told Reuters.

Under the deal, Manila will buy 367,000 tonnes of rice from Thailand tariff- free from 2010 until 2014 in exchange for not slashing its rice import duty to 20 per cent from 40 per cent at the start of 2010, as stipulated under an Asean free trade pact.

The Philippines, insisting that rice is a 'highly sensitive' product, has said it can cut the tariff only to 35 per cent by 2015.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap said last month Thailand is offering to sell another one million tonnes on top of the 367,000 tonnes in a government-to- government arrangement.

<http://www.business-times.com.sg/sub/news/story/0,4574,372173,00.html?>

- **Social Front**
- **Environmental Front**

Cambodia

- **Political Front**
- **Geo-Strategic Front**
- **Cambodia blasts Google over map of disputed Thai border**

Cambodia has hit out at Google over what it called a “radically misleading” map of the disputed Thai-Cambodia border, accusing the world’s biggest search engine of being “professionally irresponsible”.

Cambodia, which is embroiled in a bitter diplomatic row with Thailand over the demarcation of the frontier, said the Google Earth map was “devoid of truth and reality” and called for its immediate removal because it was not internationally recognised.

Cambodia made the complaint in a letter issued a day ahead of the first-ever visit to the border region by its outspoken prime minister, Hun Sen, a move likely to raise tension between the historic foes. “(The map) is devoid of truth and reality, and professionally irresponsible, if not pretentious,” Svay Sitha, secretary of state of the Cambodia’s Council of Ministers, wrote in the letter seen by Reuters yesterday.

“We therefore request that you withdraw the already disseminated, very wrong and not internationally recognised map and replace it,” he said. Both countries have a heavy military presence along the border, where deadly clashes have occurred in the past three years.

At the centre of the row is the 11th century Preah Vihear temple, ownership of which was awarded to Cambodia in a 1962 international court ruling. However, many Thais have never fully accepted the decision and the temple has been used by both countries to stoke nationalist fervour.

Thailand last year withdrew its pledge of support for Cambodia to list Preah Vihear as a UNESCO World Heritage site, arguing that jurisdiction of land around the temple had never been settled.

The move angered Hun Sen, who has since formed a provocative alliance with exiled Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra, giving him a base close to home in his fight to bring down the Thai government.

Hun Sen is accused by Bangkok of colluding with the billionaire, offering him a home and a job as an economic adviser, to escalate a five-year political crisis in Thailand. ▣

- **Cambodia's Past, Pakistan's Future?**

Pratap Chatterjee is a freelance journalist and senior editor at CorpWatch who has traveled extensively in Afghanistan and Iraq. He has written two books about the war on

terror, Iraq, Inc. (Seven Stories Press, 2004) and Halliburton's Army (Nation Books, 2009). This piece originally appeared on TomDispatch.

Sitting in air-conditioned comfort, cans of Coke and 7-Up within reach as they watched their screens, the ground controllers gave the order to strike under the cover of darkness. There had been no declaration of war. No advance warning, nothing, in fact, that would have alerted the "enemy" to the sudden, unprecedented bombing raids. The secret computer-guided strikes were authorized by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, just weeks after a new American president entered the Oval Office. They represented an effort to wipe out the enemy's central headquarters whose location intelligence experts claimed to have pinpointed just across the border from the war-torn land where tens of thousands of American troops were fighting daily.

In remote villages where no reporters dared to go, far from the battlefields where Americans were dying, who knew whether the bombs that rained from the night sky had killed high-level insurgents or innocent civilians? For 14 months the raids continued and, after each one was completed, the commander of the bombing crews was instructed to relay a one-sentence message: "The ball game is over."

The campaign was called "Operation Breakfast," and, while it may sound like the CIA's present air campaign over Pakistan, it wasn't. You need to turn the clock back to another American war, four decades earlier, to March 18, 1969, to be exact. The target was an area of Cambodia known as the Fish Hook that jutted into South Vietnam, and Operation Breakfast would be but the first of dozens of top secret bombing raids. Later ones were named "Lunch," "Snack," and "Supper," and they went under the collective label "Menu." They were authorized by President Richard Nixon and were meant to destroy a (non-existent) "Bamboo Pentagon," a central headquarters in the Cambodian borderlands where North Vietnamese communists were supposedly orchestrating raids deep into South Vietnam.

Like President Obama today, Nixon had come to power promising stability in an age of unrest and with a vague plan to bringing peace to a nation at war. On the day he was sworn in, he read from the Biblical book of Isaiah: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." He also spoke of transforming Washington's bitter partisan politics into a new age of unity: "We cannot learn from one another until we stop shouting at one another, until we speak quietly enough so that our words can be heard as well as our voices."

Return to the Killing Fields

In recent years, many commentators and pundits have resorted to "the Vietnam analogy," comparing first the American war in Iraq and now in Afghanistan to the Vietnam War. Despite a number of similarities, the analogy disintegrates quickly enough if you consider that U.S. military campaigns in post-invasion Afghanistan and Iraq against small forces of lightly-armed insurgents bear little resemblance to the large-scale war that Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon waged against both southern revolutionary guerrillas and the military of North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, who commanded a real army, with the backing of, and supplies from, the Soviet Union and China.

A more provocative -- and perhaps more ominous -- analogy today might be between the CIA's escalating drone war in the contemporary Pakistani tribal borderlands and Richard Nixon's secret bombing campaign against the Cambodian equivalent. To briefly

recapitulate that ancient history: In the late 1960s, Cambodia was ruled by a “neutralist” king, Norodom Sihanouk, leading a weak government that had little relevance to its poor and barely educated citizens. In its borderlands, largely beyond its control, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong found “sanctuaries.”

Sihanouk, helpless to do anything, looked the other way. In the meantime, sheltered by local villagers in distant areas of rural Cambodia was a small insurgent group, little-known communist fundamentalists who called themselves the Khmer Rouge. (Think of them as the 1970s equivalent of the Pakistani Taliban who have settled into the wild borderlands of that country largely beyond the control of the Pakistani government.) They were then weak and incapable of challenging Sihanouk -- until, that is, those secret bombing raids by American B-52s began. As these intensified in the summer of 1969, areas of the country began to destabilize (helped on in 1970 by a U.S.-encouraged military coup in the capital Phnom Penh), and the Khmer Rouge began to gain strength. You know the grim end of that old story.

Forty years, almost to the day, after Operation Breakfast began, I traveled to the town of Snuol, close to where the American bombs once fell. It is a quiet town, no longer remote, as modern roads and Chinese-led timber companies have systematically cut down the jungle that once sheltered anti-government rebels. I went in search of anyone who remembered the bombing raids, only to discover that few there were old enough to have been alive at the time, largely because the Khmer Rouge executed as much as a quarter of the total Cambodian population after they took power in 1975.

Eventually, a 15-minute ride out of town, I found an old soldier living by himself in a simple one-room house adorned with pictures of the old king, Sihanouk. His name was Kong Kan and he had first moved to the nearby town of Memot in 1960. A little further away, I ran into three more old men, Choenung Klou, Keo Long, and Hoe Huy, who had gathered at a newly built temple to chat.

All of them remembered the massive 1969 B-52 raids vividly and the arrival of U.S. troops the following year. "We thought the Americans had come to help us," said Choenung Klou. "But then they left and the [South] Vietnamese soldiers who came with them destroyed the villages and raped the women."

He had no love for the North Vietnamese communists either. "They would stay at people's houses, take our hammocks and food. We didn't like them and we were afraid of them."

Caught between two Vietnamese armies and with American planes carpet-bombing the countryside, increasing numbers of Cambodians soon came to believe that the Khmer Rouge, who were their countrymen, might help them. Like the Taliban of today, many of the Khmer Rouge were, in fact, teenaged villagers who had responded, under the pressure of war and disruption, to the distant call of an inspirational ideology and joined the resistance in the jungles.

"If you ask me why I joined the Khmer Rouge, the main reason is because of the American invasion," Hun Sen, the current prime minister of Cambodia, has said. "If there was no invasion, by now, I would be a pilot or a professor."

Six years after the bombings of Cambodia began, shortly after the last helicopter lifted off the U.S. embassy in Saigon and the flow of military aid to the crumbling government of Cambodia stopped, a reign of terror took hold in the capital, Phnom Penh.

The Khmer Rouge left the jungles and entered the capital where they began a systemic genocide against city dwellers and anyone who was educated. They vowed to restart history at Year Zero, a new era in which much of the past became irrelevant. Some two million people are believed to have died from executions, starvation, and forced labor in the camps established by the Angkar leadership of the Khmer Rouge commanded by Pol Pot.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/02/08/opinion/main6187210.shtml>

- **Cambodia PM visits disputed border area**

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen and his wife Bun Rany pray during a ceremony at the temple Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen wrapped up a visit yesterday to Preah Vihear temple on the country's northern border with Thailand, in a visit laced with political and military symbolism.

Both Hun Sen, a five-star general, and his wife arrived in military uniform flanked by numerous high-ranking officials, and later took part in a ceremony at the 11th-century temple. Preah Vihear has been the scene of repeated clashes between Thai and Cambodian troops over the past 18 months, with a number of deaths reported.

Government spokesman Prak Sokhon called it a dual-purpose trip.

"First, to say hello to all the troops, to encourage them and thank them for their efforts to protect the territory," he said.

"And secondly, it is to send a message to the Thai side that we don't want any war. We would like to solve any dispute through peaceful means and we are not here to use any military force unless we are forced to."

Prak Sokhon said Hun Sen would visit several border-based military units on the trip and would be away from Phnom Penh "for three or four days."

The proposed visit provoked angry exchanges between Bangkok and Phnom Penh, with Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs describing reported Thai objections to the visit as "pointless and nonsense" in a statement released late Friday.

In Bangkok yesterday, however, Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said they had no problem with Hun Sen visiting nearby Khmer territory. But he added they must first inform Thailand if they plan to enter Thai territory, the government news agency reported. Abhisit said Cambodian authorities had informed Thai officials of Hun Sen's trip and he ordered Thai security officials to monitor his movements.

Chhaya Hang, the executive director of the Khmer Institute of Democracy, a Phnom Penh-based non-governmental organisation focused on democracy, politics and human rights, said the visit was clearly a political statement aimed at Bangkok.

"(It says) that Cambodia's not backing out of this political game and not giving up any more land, and they are fed up," Chhaya Hang said. He noted that it also gives Hun Sen a chance to show his domestic audience that he is concerned about the country's borders.

Cambodia's borders, which are in the process of being demarcated, are a highly sensitive topic. The leader of the opposition, Sam Rainsy, was recently sentenced to two years in jail in absentia after he removed six wooden border posts placed by Vietnam, which is a staunch supporter of the Cambodian government.

The International Court of Justice awarded the Preah Vihear temple to Cambodia in 1962, but did not rule on the surrounding land which is claimed by both nations.

Over the past 18 months, Thai nationalists have used the Preah Vihear issue to stoke tensions. Much of the border has yet to be demarcated.

The relationship between Cambodia and Thailand has been tense for more than a year, and worsened markedly in October when Cambodia appointed Thailand's fugitive ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra to be a government adviser.

Cambodia rebukes Google over disputed Thai border map

Cambodia has accused Internet giant Google of being "professionally irresponsible" over its map of the temple, a letter seen yesterday showed.

The Google map "places almost half of the Khmer (Preah Vihear) temple in Thailand and is not an internationally recognised map," said the letter written by the secretary of state of the Cambodian Council of Ministers, Svay Sitha. DPA

times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=341556&version=1&template_id=45&parent_id=25

- **Google promises Cambodia to review temple map**

Thailand and Cambodia have been in a standoff in the disputed territory since 2008, with occasional gunfights claiming several lives. Thailand and Cambodia have been in a standoff in the disputed territory since 2008, with occasional gunfights claiming several lives.

The internet company Google has promised Cambodia it will review a map of an ancient temple at the centre of the country's border dispute with Thailand.

Cambodian authorities accused Google of being professionally irresponsible, because its Google Earth map depicts nearly half of the 11th century Preah Vihear temple as being in Thailand.

The Southeast Asian neighbours' troops have been in a standoff in the disputed territory since 2008, with occasional gunfights claiming several lives. The company says it is carefully reviewing the Government of Cambodia's objections. It added that its map data was provided by Tele Atlas, an international mapping company

<http://www.radioaustralianews.net.au/stories/201002/2816169.htm?desktop>

- **Economic Front**

- **Phnom Penh targets 26% growth in 2010**

Phnom Penh Autonomous Port will maintain a recovery into 2010 with projected 26% revenue growth, the facility's director general, Hei Bevy has said as the inland port continues to benefit from connections to Cai Mep deepwater port in Southern Vietnam.

Port Strategy: Cambodian port is targetting strong revenue growth this year

Cambodian port is targetting strong revenue growth this year

It has signed up shipping line Maersk in connecting to the new Vietnamese port, said Hei Bevy, and is now targeting \$6.25m in revenues for 2010.

The port suffered a 2% fall in revenues last year to \$4.93m following an 8.8% drop in volumes, according to figures printed in one Cambodian newspaper. These better a January 3 projection by the Phnom Penh Autonomous Port's deputy director Eang Veng Sun who estimated that revenues had dropped 15% last year, without giving a revenue forecast.

The newly issued figure for Phnom Penh also beat the downturn in Cambodian trade as the capital's port benefited from the July 2009 opening of the Cai Mep facility, which allows more convenient connections down the Mekong and cuts days off passage to North America by avoiding other, less convenient Asian hubs, particularly Singapore and Hong Kong.

http://www.portstrategy.com/archive101/2010/march/news_asia/phnom_penh_port_figures

- **Social Front**

- **Number of Cambodian landmine casualties shows further annual drop**

Official figures released Thursday showed the number of Cambodians injured by landmines and unexploded ordnance dropped 12 per cent last year from 2008 although the number killed remained constant at 47 in each year.

A total of 243 people were killed or injured in 2009 by explosive remnants of war (ERW), down from 271 the previous year, the Cambodian Mine/ERW Victim Information Service said

The number of victims has shown a steady decline year-on-year since 1994 when almost 3,000 people were killed or injured.

Chhiv Lim, a project officer for the service, said a survey undertaken four years ago showed several reasons behind the annual decline in deaths and injuries.

'We found the number one reason was demining activities, and that's because we have a lot of people involved in demining,' he said. 'The second is that people [have been educated] to understand the dangers of mines and ERW.'

Other experts have previously said a further factor in Cambodia's predominantly agricultural society has been farmers earning better prices for crops. Improved incomes mean less need to forage for supplementary products such as bamboo and firewood and a lower risk at coming across unexploded ordnance. More than half of last year's deaths and injuries came from three provinces in the country's north-west. The majority of victims were men while around one-third were children.

In 1999, Cambodia ratified the Ottawa Treaty, which bans the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines. While more than 150 countries have signed the treaty, China, Russia and the United States are among those that refuse to do so

The treaty gave countries 10 years until 2009 to clear all mines from their territory, but Cambodia missed that goal. In December, Cambodia was granted a 10-year extension on the deadline although it is still thought unlikely to reach that revised target.

This week, Germany pledged 1.4 million US dollars for demining in Cambodia's north-west, adding to around 10 million dollars it has provided for demining in the country since 1999. Cambodia has one of the highest disability rates in the world, a legacy of the country's decades of civil war that started in the 1960s and finished in the late 1990s.

http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/asiapacific/news/article_1532700.php/Number-of-Cambodian-landmine-casualties-shows-further-annual-drop

Singapore

- **Political Front**

- **Geo-Strategic**

- **Singaporeans urged to act on their commitment to Total Defence**

Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean has said Singaporeans should pool resources to overcome challenges. He said this as Singapore marked Total Defence Day on Thursday.

Singapore marks Total Defence Day every year on February 15 to commemorate the anniversary of the fall of Singapore to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. But for this year, it was marked on Thursday because February 15 coincides with the second day of

the Lunar New Year. Singapore commemorates Total Defence Day to remind Singaporeans that everyone has a part to play in defending our country. "When it matters the most, what will you defend?" The answers to that question should be more than just words.

Mr Teo said: "Apart from military conflict, we have terrorism, global economic crises, racial and religious tensions, pandemics and natural disasters.

"Our response to such challenges requires the active and collective participation of Singaporeans from all walks of life - the young and senior citizens, men and women, regardless of race or religion. And this is the true meaning behind this concept of 'Total Defence'."

Colours aplenty were also seen in the annual N.E.mation contest, which was won by the National Junior College.

NJC student Poon Chun Wai explained his team's winning entry: "Our video is about different perspectives of Singaporeans. We hope to send out the message that each and every one of them has a part to play ... each and every one of them has something that they can do about protecting Singapore in 'Total Defence'."

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1036996/1/.html>

- **Economic Front**

- **Singapore shares edge up on positive US futures, Europe cues**

Singapore shares ended slightly higher on Monday, overcoming weak regional markets on the back of strong leads from US stock futures and European bourses.

The benchmark Straits Times Index ended up 0.4%, or 10.06 points, at 2,693.62. Overall volume was 1.66 billion shares worth S\$1.38b. Losers beat gainers 318 to 186.

CIMB said in a report that global financial markets will remain volatile until there is clarity on how the financial difficulties in some European countries will be resolved.

SingTel ended up 1.7% at S\$2.95, ahead of its fiscal third-quarter results which are due before the market opens on Tuesday.

The banking sector fared well, boosted by DBS' strong fourth-quarter results announced on Friday. DBS rose 1.6% to S\$14.26, while OCBC gained 1.9% to S\$8.24 and UOB climbed 1.4% to S\$18.26. Genting Singapore fell 1.8% to S\$1.09 despite announcing that it has received the casino licence for its integrated resort in Singapore.

DBS Vickers warned in a report that share prices of casino operators tend to come off post-casino openings as initial earnings are unlikely to meet expectations. The brokerage also noted that Genting Singapore will convert S\$321 million worth of convertible bonds into shares on Tuesday at S\$0.95 per share, yielding 338 million shares.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporebusinessnews/view/1036161/1/.html>

- **More people travelling between S'pore and Malaysia for LNY**

The Lunar New Year is a few days away, and those living across the border are headed back to celebrate. Land transport companies are seeing more customers travelling between Singapore and Malaysia.

According to one bus company which provides rides between Singapore and Malaysia, it has had to double its current fleet of buses from 50 to 100. Bus companies normally face competition from budget airlines, but travelling trends are different during this period.

Budget airline flights across the border were also fully booked a few months ago. -

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1036442/1/.html>

- **social Front**

- **Religious leaders urge followers to speak out if rule of respect is breached**

Religious leaders say followers must speak out if they feel a religious elder has breached the rule of respect between religions.

The call came in the wake of the case involving Pastor Rony Tan, who had made insensitive comments about the Buddhist and Taoist faiths in three widely-circulated videos recently.

"Recent headlines have been dominated by a church pastor who made insensitive comments about the Buddhist and Taoist religions," said Syed Hassan Al-Attas, Imam of Ba'alwi Mosque. "This episode prompted various religious leaders to issue statements on the need to be respectful to other religions. But how do they ensure that the message is being heeded on the ground?" The head of Ba'alwi Mosque acknowledged that at best, what he can do is to caution mosque elders to be mindful of their words at all times.

"To talk bad about other religions is a serious matter, whether it be in private," he said. "Because in private, even in a small group among your own members, you will plant uneasiness and hatred towards other religions and other people. (It's even worse) when you talk in public." There is a small museum in the Ba'alwi Mosque, which includes Taoist and Jewish artefacts among its displays – an example of how the mosque promotes greater understanding of other faiths. The museum is open to the public.

The mosque also has guidelines for overseas speakers - no politics, and no discussing other faiths. Syed Hassan said that these guidelines have been in place as far back as 20 years ago. They were later adapted by the Islamic Council of Singapore (MUIS).

The mosque also encourages followers to speak out if they feel the line has been crossed – a sentiment which is shared by others.

"I'll walk up to (the speaker) and tell him, actually what you said is wrong, you should not be criticising other religions," said a member of the public.

"If it's a first time comment, I'll probably write to the person who did the comment. But if it's many times already ... I'll write to the bishop," another said.

On Tuesday, Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan, who is a Buddhist, also told TODAY newspaper that if the rule of respect has been breached, "we should blow the whistle and remind all about it".

For many, the government's response to Pastor Tan's videos highlighted the swiftness with which it will act in such a situation. Some said the episode revealed a silver lining.

Dr R. Theyvendran, a member of Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple, said: "No matter what you do, the fringe few would always give you that shocker once in a while, which is good, which would shake up the people's complacency, and not take things for granted."

Pastor Tan has since apologised for his remarks.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1036694/1/.html>

- **Singapore's H1N1 flu alert status returns to green: MOH**

Nearly ten months after Singapore's health authorities raised the H1N1 flu alert, the Ministry of Health (MOH) on Friday announced that it has stepped down the colour code from Yellow to Green.

Singapore raised its flu alert level to Yellow on 28 April 2009 for the first time, and then two days later to Orange. MOH then revised it downwards to Yellow on 11 May 2009.

Now as the flu alert level is back to Green, MOH said its experts will continue to actively monitor the situation locally and around the world. And the ministry will be ready to step

up appropriate precautionary and control measures, should the circumstance turn adversely.

MOH said the Influenza A (H1N1) virus continues to be the predominant flu strain circulating globally and in Singapore. But the nature of the infection has been mild and has so far shown no signs of increase in severity.

At the polyclinics, the weekly number of attendances for Acute Respiratory Infections has largely been below the epidemic level since the week of August 9-15 last year.

As for hospitals, there have been more than 1,600 admissions from complications related to the Influenza A (H1N1) infection since July last year. 100 were admitted to the intensive care unit and 20 people died.

Meanwhile, as part of continued vigilance and good patient care, acute hospitals will continue to adhere to visiting times and limit the number of visitors per patient, in order to limit cross infection in hospitals.

The public has been strongly urged to be vaccinated, especially if they are at higher risk of developing complications.

Writing in his blog, Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan noted that the colour change will be particularly helpful to the patients in the nursing homes. He understands that some nursing homes have suspended visits by students although it was not an MOH requirement.

With the colour change, Mr Khaw encouraged these nursing homes to resume such visits as the patients always look forward to seeing the young, especially if their children have not been visiting them.

Mr Khaw also encouraged Singaporeans to visit their family members or friends who are in nursing homes during the Lunar New Year period, and to do so regularly even after the festivities are over.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1037100/1/.html>

- **Environmental Front**

Laos

- **Political Front**
- **Economic Front**
- **Trade with Laos rose 4pc in 2009**

OFFICIALS from Cambodia and Laos said Wednesday they were optimistic about the future of bilateral trade following a rise of 4 percent last year, despite the onset of the global economic crisis.

Official figures released by the Laos Embassy in Phnom Penh showed that trade between the two ASEAN neighbours remained very low, however, at just US\$274,780 in 2009 compared to \$264,180 the previous year.

“Our trade will get stronger,” the Laos Embassy's First Secretary Kengchai Sixanonh said Wednesday, adding that there was considerable scope for shipments in each direction, particularly in agricultural products.

However, a 2008 trade surplus for Cambodia of \$38,620 turned into a tiny deficit of \$8,880 last year. And although trade improved in 2009 it was still down on the bilateral record between the two achieved in 2007: \$295,037.

“Trade between us is not as much as with Vietnam and Thailand,” Nguon Meng Tech, director general of the Cambodian Chamber of Commerce, said Wednesday. Trade will pick up, he added, especially when the free trade area commences in 2015.

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2010021131953/Business/trade-with-laos-rose-4pc-in-2009.html>

- **Laos and Vietnam further co-operation on trade unions**

Laos will do its utmost to further co-operation with Vietnamese Trade Union, said President Vongphet Saikeuyachongtoua of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions.

Receiving a delegation of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) delegation led by its President Nguyen Van Dung in Vientiane on 4 January, Mr. Vongphet praised and highly valued the visit to Laos of the Vietnamese delegation as a big contribution to further strengthening the special friendly relations and all-round co-operation between the two parties, states and people of Laos and Vietnam.

Mr. Vongphet also briefed his guests on the role and duties of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions and its activities to mark the 54th birthday and the sixth congress of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions which is scheduled for this year end.

While in Laos, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour delegation held a number of lectures under theme □ Vietnam lessons on building and developing workers in the new period and workers under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam □. <http://www.kplnet.net/english/news/newsrecord/09.02.2010/edn2.htm>

- **China supports Laos's entry to WTO**

The Lao PDR expressed hope of entering membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) during a meeting with Chinese delegates yesterday, who in turn vowed to support their lessons and experiences for Laos, according to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. Dr Nam Viyaketh, Industry and Commerce Minister, welcomed at the Ministry of Industry and Commerce yesterday Dr Zhang Xiangchen's courtesy call, Vice Permanent Representative of China to the WTO, and his delegates from China.

During yesterday's meeting, Dr Nam Viyaketh, and Dr Zhang Xiangchen, Vice Permanent Representative of China to WTO, discussed possibilities of helping the Lao PDR in becoming a WTO member in the future. Meanwhile Dr Zhang said that he would support Laos with lessons and experience as how Laos will be successful in its long-term efforts.

Laos is currently seeking keyway to draw valuable lessons and real experiences from China and others as it believes that many methods will be useful for Laos, especially preparedness processes involving law, juristic action, regulation and negotiation.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce disclosed yesterday that its readiness for WTO entry was 80%. But it is now waiting for the result of a meeting to be held in Geneva, Switzerland, in March.

At this meeting, Laos expects to propose and discuss these issues with the WTO. However, Laos hopes to become a WTO member in 2010. Now nobody knows for sure about Laos's membership in the world <http://www.kplnet.net/english/news/newsrecord/10.02.2010/edn3.htm> At social Front

Social Front

- **Laos may allow access to Hmong**

Laos was "moving toward" allowing access to ethnic Hmong whose repatriation by Thailand in December sparked international outrage, a US diplomat said Saturday.

Hmong refugee families stand behind bars at a Thai detention centre in Nong Khai province near Thai-Laos border in 2008. Laos was "moving toward" allowing access to

ethnic Hmong whose repatriation by Thailand in December sparked international outrage, a US diplomat said Saturday. "I think the Lao have indicated that they're moving toward allowing access but (it) may not be as quickly as we would like," the diplomat, who asked not to be named, told Western reporters.

"My sense is they indicated they were open to that," said the diplomat, who spoke in Vietnam after recent talks -- which he described as "quite good" -- in neighbouring Laos. Laotian officials "did not rule it out" but neither did they give a definite date for international access, the diplomat said.

Bangkok sparked outrage in December when it defied global criticism and used troops to repatriate about 4,500 Hmong from camps on the border with communist Laos, including 158 recognised as refugees by the United Nations. The United States, Australia, Canada and the Netherlands had offered to resettle the 158.

"We're seeking access to them, to be able to talk to them and ask them what they want to do. That was actually the group we focused on," the diplomat said. A spokesman for the Lao government has said that, to his knowledge, none of the repatriated Hmong had requested resettlement in a third country.

Human rights groups have expressed concern for the safety of the returnees but the diplomat said, "I'm not sure we've heard any reports of mistreatment." He said a US Congressman met a few of them on a recent visit, while others have got information out to relatives using mobile telephones. "So we've heard indirectly about... some of them who, as far as we can tell, are fine, fine in the sense of not being harmed, persecuted, anything like that," he said. "But we stressed to the Lao that the only way to really assure everybody involved would be really to allow access to those people." Thailand and Laos both say the Hmong, who fear persecution for fighting alongside US forces in the Vietnam War, were illegal economic immigrants.

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/167690/laos-moving-toward-hmong-access-us-diplomat>

Vietnam

- **Foreign Relations**
- **Pakistan Bombing Obama Worse Than Vietnam Bomber McCain?**

This article focuses on the Predator drone bombings of Pakistan promised by candidate Obama in his election campaign. It leaves aside the Obama-ordered air strikes in Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen and the enormous increase of the civilian death toll in these nations, at more or less the same ratio of bad guys to civilians killed as in CIA droned Pakistan.

In Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and in Iraq as well, it is civil war, not peace, that is promoted. Peace would have to include Islamists and other less than pro-American elements, which, for Obama's trainers, are all al Qaeda suspects.

According to the Pakistan News, during the month of January, just in Pakistan alone, the Predator drone bombings ordered by President Obama murdered one hundred and twenty three civilians while managing to assassinate three al Qaeda.

US Killed 123 Civilians, Three al Qaeda Men in January, "The News" 2/1/10, Lahore, Pakistan, by Amir Mir: "Afghanistan-based US predators carried out a record number of 12 deadly missile strikes in the tribal areas of Pakistan in January 2010, of which 10 went wrong and failed to hit their targets, killing 123 innocent Pakistanis. The remaining two successful drone strikes killed three al Qaeda leaders, wanted by the Americans."

A few weeks after his inauguration President Obama made good on his campaign pledge to bomb Pakistan if he determined it appropriate, ignoring the controversy regarding its legality.

Many of us remember the deafening silence from the progressive community at the time of Obama's pro-bombing Pakistan statements. Even after a year of this crime against humanity devastating life and limb, putting the populations of entire regions in freaky fear of instant death from far away in the sky, creating intense hatred for the United States and giving reason for more men of all ages to join the fight against such outrage, there is still a preciously modest amount of condemnation of Obama's inhumane homicidal tactics.

Obama has increased the amount and frequency of drone strikes and broadened the area of Pakistan menaced, in disregard of pleas from Pakistan's highest officials and a threat of being brought to court by Pakistani senators (rarely mentioned in conglomerate owned media).

The Pakistan News article continues,

"The rapid increase in the US drone attacks in the Pakistani tribal areas bordering Afghanistan can be gauged from the fact that only two such strikes were carried out in January 2009, which killed 36 people. The highest number of drone attacks carried out in a single month in 2009 was six, which were conducted in December last year. But the dawn of the New Year has already seen a dozen such attacks.

The unprecedented rise in the predator strikes with the beginning of the year 2010 is being attributed to December 30, 2009 suicide bombing in the Khost area of Afghanistan bordering North Waziristan, which killed seven CIA agents."

Has Obama obediently gone along with a mad CIA thirst for revenge?

What happened to that "war is war" equanimity and acceptance of the cycle of killing it brings? Why go further off balance fueling an inappropriate emotional desire for back and forth revenge with extra civilian deaths? Those CIA officers died in a retaliatory suicide attack by a Jordanian physician in answer to a previous "successful" assassination by CIA drone in Pakistan - nothing personal on either side intended.

"In a subsequent posthumous video tape released by Al-Jazeera, Balawi claimed while sitting next to TTP Chief Commander Hakimullah Mehsud that he would blow himself up in the CIA base to avenge the killing of former TTP chief Baitullah Mehsud in a US drone attack. [TTP = Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, in Urdu: Student Movement of Pakistan] The consequent increase in US strikes, first in North Waziristan and then South Waziristan, specifically targeting the fugitive TTP chief Hakimullah Mehsud clearly shows that revenge is the major motive for these attacks. The US intelligence sleuths stationed in Afghanistan are convinced the Khost suicide attack was planned in Waziristan with the help of the TTP. Therefore, it is believed Afghanistan-based American drones will continue to hunt the most wanted al Qaeda and Taliban leaders, especially Hakimullah, with a view to avenge the loss of the seven CIA agents and to raise morale of its forces in Afghanistan."

Obama is politically aware of the media inculcated American demand for justice (read vengeance). (Something other peoples, like Koreans, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Panamanians, Dominicans, Haitians, Cubans, Afghans, Iraqis, Somalis, Yemenis or Iranians are not supposed to expect, regardless of their millions dead and tens of millions

maimed. The United States put the equivalent of a 9/11 loss of life on Vietnam every month for fifteen years after paying the French to do it for the previous eight years. Arabs and other Muslims that have had the Western powers occupying and exploiting their lands at least since the beginning of the 1920s are demanding the same justice American's have been demanding for 9/11. But Americans are not called extremists.)

<http://www.opednews.com/articles/Pakistan-Bombing-Obama-Wor-by-Jay-Janson-100205-940.html>

- **Economic Front**
- **Investor, contractor fined \$3,250 after collapse of 10 houses**

The investor and contractor of a building construction project in Ho Chi Minh City have been fined a surprisingly low VND60 million (US\$3,250) in total for causing the collapse of ten houses last week.

According to inspectors of the city Transport Department, the fines weren't the highest because the investor Saigon M&C Real Estate Joint-stock Company and contractor French-owned Bouygues Batiment International (BBI) had met with the residents before the accident to discuss evacuation plans following estimation of the risk that nearby buildings could collapse.

In the meantime, three BBI experts from France had arrived to repair the hole in the Saigon M&C building's diaphragm wall which was built underground for retention systems as of Tuesday noon.

The hole was identified as the accident's cause, as it let underground water and mud come in, sinking the foundations of houses, said Nguyen Van Hiep, vice director of HCMC Department of Transport.

The incident happened at night with the collapse of a house on District 1's Ham Nghi Street running across Ton Duc Thang Street, where the building was located. Then in a domino effect, nine others in a row collapsed as well, but no casualties were recorded.

An additional four experts from BBI were also expected to arrive Wednesday to help solve the problem, officials said.

Hiep said all the repair plans made by BBI experts would have to be submitted to the department for approval before implementing them. It may take the contractor around one month to fix the wall, the official said, noting that the building's construction would be suspended during that time.

The investor and the contractor had also committed themselves to compensating affected households properly and proposed moving more houses around the building to guarantee safety during a meeting Tuesday with authorities of Nguyen Thai Binh Ward, where the new construction is located.

Nguyen The Dinh, chairman of Nguyen Thai Binh Ward People's Committee, said initial estimates showed that the losses were not as huge as expected. The only one house that totally collapsed had reported losses of over VND100 million (US\$5,412) in property while most of the others had moved out with their properties as suggested by the investor, he said.

<http://www.thanhniennews.com/society/?catid=3&newsid=55058>

- **Vietnam 2010 FDI inflows seen up at \$11 bln: report**

Disbursement of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Vietnam could rise 10 percent to between \$10 billion and \$11 billion this year, thanks to the global economic recovery, a government minister was quoted as saying.

"Disbursed capital in 2010 will be higher than in 2009 as the flows of pledges in previous years are high and the world's economy tends to recover," Planning and Investment Minister Vo Hong Phuc said, according to a report in Thursday's Vietnam Financial Times, which is run by the Finance Ministry.

Phuc said FDI pledges in 2010 were also expected to rise by around 10 percent to between \$22 billion and \$25 billion. The comparisons were based on actual figures on pledges and disbursements in 2009, he said, without providing further details. In December Phuc's ministry released FDI estimates for the full year showing pledges slumping to \$21.5 billion from \$66.5 billion the previous year and disbursements easing to \$10 billion from \$11.5 billion.

Foreign investment inflows, along with overseas remittances, are a key source of foreign exchange helping Vietnam offset its trade deficit. FDI pledges regularly outstrip inflows.

Last month foreign investors disbursed \$400 million in Vietnam, a third more than the same month last year, a state-run newspaper reported, quoting Planning and Investment Ministry figures. The ministry oversees foreign investment in Vietnam.

<http://www.thanhniennews.com/business/?catid=2&newsid=55025>

- **Overseas Vietnamese come home for business opportunities**

Many overseas Vietnamese, known as Viet Kieu, say they are returning home this year not only to celebrate the country's traditional New Year with their families, but also to seek business opportunities here.

Minh Doan, an information technology engineer in the US, said he would spend part of his Tet vacation in Vietnam scouting restaurant locations and surveying food and drink trends in Ho Chi Minh City. Dinh Kim Nguyet, a Viet Kieu from Canada, also said she was trying to expand her family's Viet Au Company, which produces fish nets, adding that her products had already been exported to France, Norway, and England. "The largest objective of doing business in Vietnam isn't to earn benefits for myself but to make contributions to my home country," Nguyet said.

Tran Van Quoc, an overseas Vietnamese from France, said he would invest in seafood and fruit trees farms in his Mekong Delta hometown in Ben Tre Province. Quoc has already opened an 8,000-square-meter restaurant in Ben Tre.

Phan Tham, chairman of the HCMC Committee for Overseas Vietnamese, said that although no official survey had been conducted, he had observed that "many" Viet Kieu returning for Tet wanted to open businesses in Vietnam.

Tam said many Viet Kieu intellectuals, experts and highly-skilled workers had told him they wanted to work in Vietnam and had recently applied for new Vietnamese driver's licenses or renewals.

According to Tham, more than 300 businesses were established by Viet Kieu in Vietnam last year, while 400 overseas Vietnamese experts and university graduates worked at Vietnam-based businesses.

Viet Kieu-related agencies also said overseas remittances were being invested in various services, tourism enterprises, real estate projects and agricultural processing firms.

The State Bank of Vietnam reported that remittances last year totaled over US\$6.28 billion, a 12.8 percent decrease year-on-year.

But the HCMC Committee for Overseas Vietnamese estimated that around 300,000 Viet Kieu would arrive in Ho Chi Minh City for Tet via Tan Son Nhat International Airport by February 21 (the 15th day of Lunar new Year), a 10-15 percent increase from last year.

Nationwide, a total of some 500,000 overseas Vietnamese are expected to return home for Tet, the agency said.

<http://www.thanhniennews.com/overseas/?catid=12&newsid=55139>

- **Vietnam not to invest anymore in small oil refineries**

The State-owned Oil and Gas Group (PetroVietnam) President on January 5 announced a decision not to invest in oil refineries with an annual capacity of 6.5 mm tons or less.

Dinh La Thang said the decision was drawn from a lesson learned regarding the nation's first oil refinery Dung Quat in the central province of Quang Ngai. As a result, the two oil refinery projects, Nghi Son in the central province of Thanh Hoa and Long Son in the southern oil-rich province of Ba Ria-Vung Tau, will have an annual capacity of 10 mm tons each, he added.

The Nghi Son project is likely to launch construction bidding and signing of the engineering, procurement and construction contract in 2010.

In regards to the Long Son project, PetroVietnam is negotiating with foreign contractors, including Malaysia and the Republic of Korea, on conditions to set up joint-ventures. Despite some disagreements, PetroVietnam expect to sign agreements within this year. PetroVietnam is also working with a design contractor to increase the Dung Quat refinery's annual capacity to 10 mm tons of product from the current 6.5 mm tons.

The nation's leading oil and gas group has also worked out a number of targets for 2010, which include the extraction of 15 mm tons of crude oil and 8 mm tons of gas. Other major targets are the production of 740,000 tons of urea fertiliser, 10.5 bn kWh of electricity, 4.9 mm tons of assorted fuels and gas, 651,000 tons of LPG and exportation of 9.43 mm tons of crude oil.

The targets were announced by the group at an online meeting between Hanoi, Quang Ngai province, Can Tho city and Ho Chi Minh City on January 5.

<http://www.gasandoil.com/goc/company/cns100650.htm>

- **Vietnam says proposal on prices adheres to WTO**

A draft proposal on pricing in Vietnam does not contradict the country's World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments, the government said after foreign firms raised fears of price controls.

"The draft of this circular is not in contradiction to the pricing ordinance in 2002 as well as Vietnam's commitments to the WTO," Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Nguyen Phuong Nga said in comments received late Thursday.

The 2002 ordinance said the state respects the right to self-pricing and price competition, she said.

Earlier this month, United States ambassador Michael Michalak said the US was concerned about the Vietnamese proposal. He said the American Chamber of Commerce as well as other foreign and local business groups were also concerned and in discussions with Vietnamese authorities.

"I hope that we'll be able to come to a satisfactory conclusion," he said. According to the European Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam, the draft would impose price controls on a variety of products including petrol, gas, steel and cement. It would apply to foreign as well as local private enterprises, in contrast to a current regulation that affects only state-owned firms, the chamber said.

The WTO, which Vietnam joined three years ago, is the only global international organisation dealing with the rules of trade between nations.

Nga said the Ministry of Finance draft, which is open for public comments, aimed to help authorities stabilise prices "to protect the benefits of businesses and consumers".

http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific_business/view/1037102/1/.html

- **Vietnam floats new eco idea**

Eco friendly resort developments could be the next big attraction in the real estate market in Vietnam but experts are warning that there are no standards...

In fact it is quite possible that projects can be labelled green but actually have very few environmentally friendly attributes, according to Nguyen Xuan Chau, Lecturer at the Economics University in Ho Chi Minh.

The Ministry of Construction confirmed that it does not have any standards for ecological real estate products. 'It is quite a new concept here,' a spokesman said.

Chau said that there is no exact description of what can be called an ecological real estate project and he is concerned that property investors may be being given false information by developers and agents.

He added that so-called green projects are often priced higher and are located in beautiful locations where perhaps their impact on the environment is even more questionable.

According to recent reports from consultants eco-friendly apartments sell well and are rapidly being developed in coastal areas and alongside waterways. Dong Nai province has more projects dubbed ecological than any other area.

According to Marc Townsend, managing director of CB Richard Ellis, the resort real estate market has huge potential in Vietnam as the country's tourism sector is still under developed compared with other neighbouring regions such as Bali.

The sector is regarded as a god opportunity for real estate investors as tourism numbers are expected to increase in coming years. At present, many investors are eyeing coastal property projects embedded with tourism development goals.

According to figures from the General Tourism Office there were 4.2 million tourists in 2008 bringing in a total turnover of \$3 billion. In the first half of 2009, over two million of tourists visited Vietnam, bringing in revenue of \$1.9 billion. This year it is predicted that around 6 million tourists will visit bringing in over \$4 billion in revenue.

Nguyen Quang Hai, chairman of the An Phat Group, said that previously investors bought tended to be speculators but now there are more seeking a long term investment that brings a steady return and in this respect tourism projects are ideal. He added that he believes that projects that are sustainable and ecological will prove to be the most popular with investors.

<http://www.themovechannel.com/news/2f77d9ad-a6a8/>

- **Viet Nam: Tropical depression South Vietnam - situation update**

Yesterday, the tropical depression developed in the sea South of Vietnam on January 19 has crossed the South of Vietnam and has dissolved when reaching Cambodia. It affected the provinces with strong winds and medium to locally heavy rain. It has caused 4 casualties in Binh Thuan and Vung Tau provinces.

On January 20, 2010, at around 10-11am, a tropical depression made landfall in the provinces Binh Thuan to Soc Trang. In the afternoon, it quickly developed into a low pressure zone heading towards the Cambodian border, at a wind strength under 39km/h. The South Central, Southern and Central Highlands provinces experienced medium rain

to locally heavy rain. In the late afternoon, the low pressure zone moved further inland and gradually weakened before eventually dissolving.

Casualties and damages

According to the first provincial reports, 70 ships, (Binh Thuan: 68, Khanh Hoa: 2) sunk or were damaged, and 4 people have died:

Mr. Tran Yen, (1973, Chaoyang village, Tam Thanh district, Phu Quy island, Binh Thuan) died when his basket boat flipped over on his way to the shore. Two other people on the boat survived.

Mr. Nguyen Minh Hau (1965, Thanh Hai ward, Phan Thiet city, Binh Thuan) died of similar cause.

Mr. Le Van Trung (1954, Chi Cong commune, Tuy Phong district, Binh Thuan) was hit by a hard object on his chest while anchoring his boat.

Mr. Pham Van Hien (1985, Ninh Binh, Vung Tau city, Vung Tau) died when his boat flipped over, and got trapped in the helm. 4 other people that were on the boat swam to the shore and survived.

Government response

At central level

Since January 19, CCFSC has been in close contact with the affected provinces and cities to provide updated information, and directions on what to do regarding the depression (Letter no 02/ CĐ-TW dated 19/1/2010).

The Ministry of Health through emergency letter 450/CD-BYT, directed the Health department of provinces and coastal cities from Khanh Hoa to Ca Mau, and Kien Giang on the necessary preventive and response measures to be implemented.

The Command of Border Guards guided his divisions and units in 12 provinces and cities on what needed to be done.

At local level

Provinces and cities from Binh Dinh to Ca Mau and Kien Giang have been actively implementing the CCFSC directions and are regularly providing information about damages and casualties. They have been calling boats for safe anchorage, and have been monitoring the water levels in rivers and reservoirs. Families who have lost relatives have received financial assistance.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/MUMA-82M4EC?OpenDocument>

- **Social Front**

Brunei

- **Economic Front**
- **Social Front**
- **Local Muslims Behind Alcohol Smuggling**

Almost half of the alcohol smugglers nabbed by the enforcement officers last year were local Malay Muslims, teenagers and youths.

Based on last year's figures by the Royal Brunei Customs and Excise Department, there were some 385 alcohol smuggling cases reported, out of which 167 offenders were Malay Muslims. 175 of the culprits were teenagers and youths aged between 15 and 30 years.

Imams blamed today's youth during the Friday sermon yesterday expressing concern on this unhealthy trend. They appealed to parents and guardians to monitor their children closely while urging the society at large to provide the authorities with information on such undesirable activities.

The Imams further admonished Muslims youth saying that every Muslim involved in the booze transaction will be cursed by Allah of which they cited many types, starting right from manufacturing, selling, asking people to purchase it for them, consuming it, pouring it, smuggling it and earning an income from it.

The religious leaders further said that the government's effort to prohibit beer smuggling was a wise decision and was in line with the Muslim religion and there were reasons behind such a ban. They stated that for Muslims to sell liquor, to gamble, to indulge in fortune-telling, worshipping anyone other than Allah was filthy and were considered acts of Satan and the Ummah needed to stay away from such activities.

The bad consequences of consuming liquor in one's belief were enormous and brings more harm than good starting with affecting one's health, beliefs, mind and morals, keeping one away from Allah and from performing prayers, creating foes and hatred among individuals, leading one to fatal accidents by driving under the influence, disintegrating family, society and the nation.

Alcohol, they said dulls one's senses and makes one totally unreasonable. A man who has lost his powers of reasoning could resort to adultery and indulge in inhuman vile acts like incest even with one's own biological offspring besides becoming violent.

The Imams encouraged the young Ummah to find a Halal source of income instead, which was not against Islam such as regular business. They cited selling of alcohol as a prime example of a non-Halal source of income. -- Courtesy of Borneo Bulletin

<http://www.brudirect.com/index.php/2010021315797/First-Stories/local-muslims-behind-alcohol-smuggling.html>

- **Police anti-riot demo wows public**

A student pulls the trigger of a tear gas weapon during a 'Public Order' demonstration at the marching grounds of the Police Training Centre at the Police Headquarters. Members of the Royal Brunei Police Force yesterday showcased their skills in riot dispersion and THE Royal Brunei Police Force (RBPF) wowed the public yesterday with an anti-riot and VIP protection demonstration dubbed the "Public Order" show at the marching grounds of the Police Training Centre (PTC) at the Police Headquarters.

Riding high on the success of the Police Day Exhibition held in the capital last month, the RBPF has organised a new-round of exhibitions at the PTC, which will be concluded tomorrow from 9am to 6pm. The "Public Order" show will be held again today at 3pm, and twice tomorrow at 10am and at 3pm.

Yesterday's show began with a demonstration on protection of VIPs, where police personnel demonstrated their advanced driving skills and manoeuvres.

Later, a motorcade drove round the marching ground led by four police officers on motorcycles, followed by three cars, the middle car being the one carrying a "VIP".

When the VIP car was "attacked", the cars screeched to a halt, made a lightning fast turn and drove the "VIP" to safety.

The crowd of students from Anthony Abel College in Seria and Chung Hwa Secondary School was entertained some more with the anti-riot demonstration, where a group of

"protesters" walked out carrying a placard which read "Kami mahu bebas!" (We want freedom).

The riot police from the Police Reserve Unit D Company came out in their specials vehicles, in full-riot gear, and told the "protesters" to disperse. But the "protesters" pushed on, making a nuisance even going so far as to start a fire. Much laughter ensued when a protesters threw a water bomb which hit one of the riot police in the head and drenched him. The riot police soon took control of the situation by using their water cannons and dispersing coloured gases and arresting some of the protesters.

The Public Relations Unit of the force told The Brunei Times that the last anti-piracy demonstration on the waters of Kampong Ayer was watched by 7,000 visitors.

Due to popular demand from the public, the organising committee of the police day celebration decided to extend the exhibition. Schools across the country have been invited to watch the exhibition to give the students an insight into the daily activities of police officer of various units. Jobseekers and potential candidates for the police force will also be able to get to know the roles and duties involved in being an officer in greater detail. Officers from units such as the Women and Child Abuse Unit, the Marine Police, Special Operation Squad will be standing by to answer questions from the public about their respective units and sections. The Brunei Times

<http://www.bt.com.bn/en/news-national/2010/02/13/police-anti-riot-demo-wows-public>

- **Brunei Well Placed To Join Obama's Interfaith Dialogue Initiative**

Having recently returned from the Singapore Air Show, I was very pleased to see a strong representation by Bruneian businesses and officials at the show.

While there, I was able to continue to bring the message that Brunei is a place where American companies can and should look to expand their business.

My role as US Ambassador to Brunei provides me with an important platform to discuss how and why Brunei and the United States should continue to expand our commercial ties. In addition to discussing the Singapore Air Show this week, I'd like to follow up and answer questions on two issues I have been getting a lot of question about: The Copenhagen Accord and President Obama's Interfaith dialogue. As always, I welcome your questions at ask_usambassador@yahoo.com This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it

Singapore Air Show

As many of you know, this week's Singapore Air Show is one of the premier regional and global aviation exhibition and trade shows. It is an opportunity for civil and military aviation companies and suppliers to show their latest products as well as develop and enhance new customer relations.

As always, American companies (ranging from Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and many more) are exhibitors. I was especially pleased to see that Piper Air was also a participant. Piper now has strong ties to Brunei and is looking to build a flight school as well as headquarters here in Brunei. Piper is just one example of how Brunei and the US can further strengthen our commercial ties. Whether it is in general aviation, like Piper, or commercial aviation, like Boeing, there are plenty of opportunities to expand our cross investment.

In addition, defence industries are also another crucial link between our two great nations. While in Singapore, I took the opportunity to continue to press home the

message that Brunei is a place for American companies to do more business while also emphasising the quality and quantity of goods and services US firms can offer to the Bruneian consumer, be that consumer a business, or government.

Copenhagen Accord:

I have spoken in the past about the Copenhagen Accord and I wanted to update everyone on where this important political agreement stands since I often get questioned on the US position.

As many of you know, the accord has some important core elements: 1) The objective to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 Degree Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels, 2) Listing the mitigation targets or actions by all major economies and others in a position to do so, and 3) Significant new funding and financing mechanisms, which includes a new global fund.

The US is ramping up our funding on climate change and we are prepared to mobilise significant resources. In 2010, the US will triple its core international climate financing from USAID, Treasury, and the State Department to just over USD \$1 billion.

Major developed countries (Australia, Canada, EU-27, Japan, Russia and the United States) as well as major emerging economies (Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa) have inscribed their actions they will take to reduce emissions.

There are approximately 90 countries who have associated with or inscribed the actions they will take to reduce emissions as part of the Copenhagen Accord. The sincere hope is that as many nations as possible will associate with the Copenhagen Accord so we can continue a global effort to address climate change.

Interfaith Dialogue:

As many of you read earlier in the week, I was pleased to welcome officials from our office of International Religious Freedom as well as the Secretary of State's Policy and Planning Office.

As the news articles noted, both officials truly enjoyed their time in Brunei. Any reader of this column knows, one of my top priorities is ensuring that more US government officials as well as business and educational leaders come to Brunei.

This visit was just such an opportunity.

I was pleased Brunei was able to show our State Department officials the positive aspects of life in Brunei as well as allowing them an honest assessment of areas of mutual concern. As noted, Brunei would be well placed to join in President Obama's Interfaith Dialogue initiative.

Originally discussed in the President's Cairo speech, the Department of State is working closely with many leaders to bring this worthwhile initiative forward. Southeast Asia will play a critical role in this regard.

Brunei could serve as a model because it not only strives for social harmony but also has the ability to address concerns raised both internally and externally in a constructive and beneficial manner. As I said during many of our meetings, I truly respect that I am able to speak frankly here in Brunei as a friend and fan of Brunei.

Honest and open communication allow us to deal with those issues, be they "big or small" that friends often confront. Religion plays an important and constructive role in both our great nations and it is a tie that we share and should work to promote.

<http://www.brudirect.com/index.php/Columnist-Column/brunei-well-placed-to-join-obamas-interfaith-dialogue-initiative.html>

