PROJECT ON BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

ASIA REPORT

Fourth Quarterly Report on Asia

October to December 2008

Volume: 1

Reports of October 2008

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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
ISLAMABAD

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Department of Politics and International Relations
International Islamic University Islamabad

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Reports of **October 2008**

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15° S
1000 mi
Coral Sea
1000 km
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180°
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BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

ASIA REPORT

October 08, 2008

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BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

SOUTH & EAST ASIA and GCC & Fertile Crescent

Nadia Tasleem

Weekly Report from 20 September to 3 October 2008

Presentation: 8 October 2008

The report is comprised of two parts. First part is based on the review of news items focusing on political, economic, social and geo-strategic developments in various regions namely; South Asia, East Asia and Fertile Crescent from 20 September to 26 September as have been collected by interns; while second part of the report aims to review four articles, in context of South Asia.

PART I

Summary

South Asia:

Political Front:

At Bangladeshi political front government on one hand has been trying to arrange political dialogue with key political parties; on the other hand government lawyer's criticism against Hasina Wajid's bail petition, in Supreme Court, has raised doubts regarding government's sincerity to resolve political deadlock. Meanwhile AL has intensified efforts to make 'Grand electoral alliance' to form next regime. Lastly EC has won great appreciation by all political parties over his announcement of the date of parliamentary elections. All the while his decision to hold upazila elections within one week of the parliamentary elections has been called as unrealistic. Moving towards Srilanka two divergent opinions have come up amidst ongoing chaos and mayhem. Government officials have expressed their satisfaction over government's policy that has led to the formation of a Provincial Council in the Eastern region that represents all communities of the respective region including Sinhala, Tamils and Muslims. On the other hand many still consider 'devolution of power' to peripheries to be the only viable solution to ongoing political crisis in Srilanka. In case of Maldives the most remarkable development is first hearing of the case filed by Social Liberal Party (SLP) against the Election Commission over the eligibility of DRP's presidential candidate Maumoon Abdul Gayoom to contest the forthcoming

presidential elections, as he has already completed 6 Presidential terms. Meanwhile the Diplomatic Community based in Colombo has strongly appreciated the government for the progress and success it has achieved under the Reform Agenda initiated by President Gayoom in 2004. Nepali PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal has expressed his willingness to enhance cooperation with international community to bring stability in the country. All the while he condemned the US for its unchanging view about Maoists till now. Release of seven more political prisoners by military junta in Myanmar has raised positive hopes of the UN and other human rights agencies. Meanwhile pro-democracy activists have started putting more pressure over ruling regime to release their political leader.

Moving towards India, anti-Christian attacks flared Orissa. Hindu extremist factions are involved in these attacks. Despite imposing curfew and deploying more security forces in the region government has so far failed to bring stability in the effected area. Security has also enhanced in Tamil Nadu amidst recent security threats over there. Meanwhile a recently published e-mail, in the name of Islamic Mujahideen taking responsibility of Delhi and Ahmedabad blasts, in a newspaper aim to provoke hatred within Hindus against Muslims and Islam. Hence Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali requested Central government to take serious action against such efforts of news publishers in order to maintain peace and stability in the country.

Another significant development is submission of first part of the Godhra Commission report in the Assembly, claiming that incident of burning of coach in Gujrat in 2002 was a pre-planned act and not an accident. Second part of the report has to be submitted yet.

Geo-strategic Front:

Governments of Srilanka and Maldives have shown serious concerns about blast in Marriot hence have expressed their sympathy with Pakistan. Meanwhile Bhutan and the Assamese state government have agreed to strengthen security along the border to check infiltration of militants and to beef up the information sharing process. Lastly India has expressed satisfaction with Indo-Burmese agreement to build hydro-power plants and declared it to be a major ‘strategic victory’. The US however urged India and China to review their policies vis-à-vis Myanmar’s oppressive military junta.

A US Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the US-India Nuclear Agreement by a 19-2 margin. Meanwhile the US and India have decided to hold bilateral Malabar series of exercise this year. India has accused Pakistan for supporting terrorist activities in Kashmir. Meanwhile Indian and Pakistani PM decided to enhance cooperation in order to counter terrorism effecting both countries and also in economic field. France has extended full support to UNSC extension hence has prepared case for permanent Indian inclusion in UNSC. India and China have expressed satisfaction over border talks.

Social Front:

In Bangladesh serious water crisis has made life miserable for common people. Government has failed to resolve this issue despite its promises. In Maldives question of discrimination on the basis of veil has been raised by Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). Party leader emphasized on the need to provide equal opportunities to women either with or without veil. Recent floods have further increased miseries of the effected people in Nepal.

Despite all the above mentioned social developments Corruption Perception Index (CPI) report 2008 carried by Transparency International (TI) grabbed special attention. According to the report Bangladesh ranked 10th position from below out of 180 countries in the world. Earlier in 2007, Bangladesh had ranked seventh position, in 2006, third and between the year of 2001 and 2005, it was branded as the top listed corrupt country in the world. Therefore government has brought some improvement in this regard. Meanwhile Maldives has been ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world; as has slid 31 places down this year hence has been kept in the 17th place of the most corrupt countries while India holds 14th, Nepal 16th, Sri Lanka, 21st, Bhutan 36th places. All the while among East Asian states Cambodia has dropped five positions from last year, now 14 from bottom.

At Indian social front increasing death toll because of heavy floods remained at top. All the while Indian Tata Motors have started evacuating eastern India amidst strong opposition by natives of that area. Besides that BJP's raised voice against Vice-Chancellor Mushirul Hasan's support for two students of the Jamia Millia Islamiah who have been accused by police for having indulged in terrorist acts; also grabbed attention.

Economic Front:

At economic front Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has fallen by 16 per cent worth taka US $ 12.70 crore in Bangladesh due to political unrest and recent power crisis faced by the country. Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Germany, T.B. Maduwegedera has urged German companies to invest in Sri Lanka; being second largest investor in Srilanka within EU. Meanwhile the United States Mission to Sri Lanka announced the launch of a new multi-year initiative, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), aimed at promoting economic growth in Sri Lanka's East. Moving towards Maldives, STO reduced the price of diesel by Rf.075 per liter and petrol by Rf0.25 per liter. According to a statement issued by the company the company lowered its prices of fuel oil prices at a time when the world oil prices after remaining at US $ 91 per barrel suddenly jumped to US $ 129 per barrel. Nepalese government has recently announced a new policy to supple petroleum according to which the price of the petroleum product will increase with the increase in the international market and vice versa.

Indian economists claimed that inflation will remain in double digits until the end of January in part due to higher prices of manufactured products.

East Asia:

Political Front:

To begin with Malaysia Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim has delayed his plan to topple Abdullah Badawi's regime in order to ensure political stability. Meanwhile has denied opposition claims that it has made initial contact with the government through third parties to facilitate a transition of power. Thailand is still passing through a phase of political instability. Anti-government protestors remained active in their demonstrations by claiming that new cabinet is full of Thaksin cronies hence they would continue their campaign unless cabinet gets changed. As far as Muslims in South are concerned, their representatives have hold talks for the first time in Indonesia with government officials to discuss ways to solve their problem. By the end of this round Muslim representatives of South announced to hold another round of talks with the government in November. Political scene of Philippines seems to be dominated by conflict in South. Recent clashes between government forces and Muslim guerrillas have led to deaths of a fisherman and his family plus 16 other Muslims combatants. Muslims have appealed international community to play an active role in order to resolve political crisis in Philippines. Meanwhile President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo also assured his commitment to bring peace in the region. Cambodia's parliament re-elected Hun Sen as prime minister, extending his 23-year grip on power, at a session boycotted by parties disputing the results of the July general election.

Social Front:

In Singapore, consumer confidence in China-made products has taken a hit, following the melamine-tainted milk scandal. All the while heavy rains have caused severe traffic jams leading to road accidents. Likewise severe typhoon is expected to hit various regions of Vietnam due to wet weather. Vietnam already needs 300 kip to recover flood disaster. Laos has also suffered a lot by floods. Therefore the United Nations has appealed for US$10 million from the international community to assist flood effectees in Laos. Cambodia has also suffered a lot because of heavy rains.

Economic Front:

At economic front Malaysia has emerged as leading investor in Thailand. Meanwhile slowing economy is thought to be the most serious concern for people in Thailand. Economy of Singapore seems to be better where inflation has further dropped to 6.4%. However prices of

food, transportation, housing and construction materials have further increased in Vietnam. Despite growing inflation Vietnam has emerged as the most attractive new emerging market, topping a list of 10 tomorrow's high growth markets according to a report. Lastly political stability in Cambodia has raised probability of increased investments in the kingdom.

Fertile Crescent:

Political Front:

To begin with Iraq Kirkuk issue is still under debate. Kurdish legislator accused ruling regime for its inability to develop consensus over the provincial elections bill. Right now both parties have started negotiating a UN proposed bill though its content has not been declared as yet. Besides that instability and chaos still prevails. Returning refugees and the US security officials remained main victims of violence. In order to lessen Hezbollah's control Lebanon's Al Mustaqbal Movement leader MP Saad Hariri declared that Beirut will never again be a hostage to Hezbollah weapons, but should be under state-army control. Two significant developments in case of Israel and Palestine include resignation of Ehud Olmert amidst corruption cases and a recent terrorist act in Jerusalem wounding 17 people.

Geo-strategic Front:

Iraq discussed probability of opening a border crossing Iraq and Turkey, with Turkish ambassador, in order to enhance trade between the two countries. Meanwhile Iraq signed reconstruction contracts with French companies. Syria signed judicial and legal agreement of cooperation with Belarus. All the while Syrian Minister of Islamic Endowments Mohammad during his meeting with Head of the Denmark Church delegation discussed the role of scholars and clergymen in boosting dialogue and fraternal ties among different nations and religions. In terms of Syrian-Lebanese relations, the most significant development is recent deployment of 10, 000 Syrian troops at Lebanese border in order to conduct anti-smuggling operations according to Syrian regime; yet Lebanese seem to be a bit uncomfortable due to this development. At Israeli geo-strategic front the most significant development is President's invitation to Arab Leaders to come to Jerusalem in order to discuss peace process. All the while Israel has also expressed serious concerns about Iranian bid for Security Council seat. Lastly Jordan has reiterated its support for Palestine.

Social Front:

At social front the only significant development that grabbed attention is that around 50 student activists gathered in front of the German-Jordanian University (GJU) to protest higher education policies in the Kingdom, which they argue support the "privatization" of public universities by allowing increased fees and parallel programmes.

Economic Front:

Syria has enhanced its focus on output and production of more quantities of the oil exploration. Governor of Israel claimed that the Bank of Israel is ready to take steps to deal with the financial crisis but no measures are currently needed since Israel's financial markets are functioning well. At Jordanian economic front few significant economic developments include; a 15 million euro deal in service sector, between the Kingdom and the European Commission that aims to enable Jordanian service industry to penetrate the European markets; Greek recent announcement to provide Jordan with $720,000 through Hellenic Aid to enhance tourism services in the mosaic city of Madaba and to protect and preserve an ancient Byzantine-era church. Lastly, Jordan ranked 6th out of 142 countries in 2007, according to the 2008 World Investment Report issued by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in terms of countries' potentials in attracting foreign direct investments.

PART II

This part of the report is based on review of few articles related to South Asia. In this part I would try to discuss basic ideas of all these articles in terms of recent developments in the respective region.

Articles Review:

July 30, 2008

"Surging Energy and Food Prices will accelerate Economic Downtrend in Bangladesh"

Anand Kumar (Associate Fellow at the IDSA)

IDSA Strategic Comments

This article discusses recent economic crisis being faced by Bangladesh. Main reasons behind the crisis and its likely impacts have also been highlighted. All the while significant factors that have helped Bangladesh to retain till now have also been pointed out. Article begins with the point that prices have increased in Bangladesh mainly due to rising food and oil prices worldwide. Care taker government therefore had to increase the prices of oil products including kerosene and diesel accordingly. Besides that government had to raise prices in order to cut subsidies on imported fuel. Though government had no other option except increase in prices yet high level of inflation that has reached double figure quite recently has raised concerns of people as well as economist in the country. It is assumed that rapid inflation would cause social unrest as poor masses that currently account almost 400,000 people, are suffering badly. Besides that hike in fuel prices would also cause greater unemployment by creating difficulties for the all important garment industry. Government has launched various programs to meet the needs of the poor but these programs haven't brought any positive impact upon the lives of poor. Despite all these issues Bangladesh has not faced serious crisis so far. Many reasons as being pointed out by writer in this regard include; excessive assistance being provided by the UN and other organizations to the country; growing remittances by Bangladeshis working abroad plus growth in overseas employment. Though all these factors have helped Bangladesh to survive till now yet government has to adopt appropriate measures to attract investments and to stabilize economy in order to avoid political instability.

June 16, 2008

"Bangladesh: Fixing the Democratic Future"

Smruti S. Pattanaik (Research Fellow at the IDSA)

IDSA Strategic Comments

This article discusses political scenario of Bangladesh in terms of various issues related to Sheikh Hasina's bail, Khaleda Zia's arrest, political parties' response to planned elections, government's efforts in this regard, Western stance and probable future scenario. Article begins with the point that Sheikh Hasina's release on bail and her departure from country for medical treatment has raised positive hopes of people regarding chances of reconciliation between government and opposition party. Meanwhile Khaleda Zia's party activists have also started putting effort for her release. Negotiations between care taker regime and various political parties regarding finalization of election preparations seem to be in full swing, yet these two most significant parties i.e. AL and BNP can not be considered as reliable as they both have been warning government to boycott elections in case government does not fulfill their demands. The United States and other Western countries have strongly condemned both these parties for lack of cooperation with CTR. They stressed that full cooperation of all political parties especially these

two most significant parties is inevitable to bring political stability in Bangladesh therefore they should extend full cooperation. Care taker regime has already taken substantive measures to bring reforms in order to hold successful elections. Government has also declared its full commitment to hold elections in time. Writer claims that government seems to be keen to fulfill its promises in order to avoid pre January 2007 situation.

August 19, 2008

"China's strategic intent in Myanmar"

***Gurpreet S. Khurana** (Research Fellow at the IDSA)*

IDSA Strategic Comments

This short article focuses on Chinese strategic interest in Myanmar in the light of recent Chinese naval officers' visit to Myanmar's Coco islands that are sited close to India's Andaman Islands. This visit has indicated Chinese military involvement in Myanmar that may have grave security implications for India. Chinese strategic interests in Myanmar previously raised Indian concerns in 1990s when people started writing about Chinese-Burmese military cooperation, permanent deployment of Chinese troops in Myanmar and acquisition of military bases in Myanmar by China. Many of those writings lacked credibility as China never deployed its military troops in Myanmar on permanent basis therefore Chinese strategic interest in Myanmar go ignored initially. The 1998 reports regarding Chinese military and technical assistance to Myanmar and Chinese assistance to upgrade the existing facilities primarily the older radars and other electronic equipment. Besides that China's involvement in the naval wharf project in Great Coco Island in 2002 also indicate Chinese strategic interest in the country. All these previous developments when observed in relation with recent naval officers' visit to Coco islands clearly evince Chinese interest in Myanmar raising serious concerns of India.

September 22, 2008

"Revisiting the Kosi Agreement: Lessons for Indo-Nepal water Diplomacy"

***Medha Bisht** (Research Assistant at the IDSA)*

IDSA Strategic Comments

This article is based on recent disastrous floods causing severe damage to both India and Nepal. Both countries blamed one another for failing to prevent such a massive disaster. In this regard

Nepal severely blamed Kosi Agreement by calling it to be a suicidal and an unreciprocal agreement. Writer first discusses brief history of the agreement then points out Indian and Nepalese major concerns in this regard and finally discusses available options for the two countries. Kosi agreement was signed in 1954 then went under amendment in 1960s and then passes through a third phase in 1980s. It was first signed in order to regulate the flow of the river and ensure flood management. In accordance with it a barrage was constructed that had to be utilized for power generation and irrigation purposes. India had to fund the whole project. In return it had to irrigate maximum of Indian land. In second phase amendment was brought determining the lease period of 199 years which later on raised concerns. In third phase India proposed the idea of an alternative project. Right now two main contentious points for both countries include the issue of water rights and the question of the management, control and operation of the barrage. Both countries need to reach at a practical solution in order to get benefit of this project otherwise both will have to pay the cost as none of them can survive without co-operation in this case.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

South Asia

Ghashia Kayani

Weekly Report: from 27 September to 3 October 2008

Bangladesh:

POLITICAL:

- AL to legalize activities of CG, if voted to power
- BNP's grass roots want 'honest, dedicated' candidates in JS polls
- Hasina-Khaleda dialogue
- ACC to strengthen a last ditch fight against corrupt politicians
- AL to launch movement to restore democracy after Hasina's return

SOCIAL:

- Govt likely to form special body to protect rivers from pollution

ECONOMIC:

- Prices of spices, meat on the rise
- Govt incurs loss of Tk 25.54cr yearly
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Bangladesh
- IFC to promote setting up special economic zones
- BD seeks unrestricted market access for LDC products
- PDB increases power price by 16 pc for distributing agencies

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- KSA assures Bangladeshi workers' welfare

AL to legalise activities of CG, if voted to power

Awami League (AL) Acting President Zillur Rahman said if the AL is voted to power, it would legalise all activities and reforms conducted by this caretaker government during it tenure. If we can form government through elections, we will legalise the 'lawful tasks' carried out by this

government in last 18 months," said the veteran AL leader after meeting with the leaders and activists of Bangabandhu Sanskiritik Jote, a front organization of AL, at his Gulshan residence. Replying to a query about the Chief Adviser's address to an audience of Bangladeshi expatriates in the US, he expressed his grave concern over the concept of the caretaker government in politics saying that "I don't know about the future of the system but it might be changed in the long run. Time will say in this regards." He said if the date of Upazila polls are not shifted, the grassroots level leaders and activists will face severe difficulties in conducting election campaigns.

BNP's grass roots want 'honest, dedicated' candidates in JS polls

In order to strengthening grassroots level organizational activities, BNP central leaders have already started visiting different districts across the country; the organizational activities will be made stronger after Eid. As the grassroots level leaders and activists are demanding that they want to see 'qualified and dedicated' person as candidates for contesting from their respective constituencies in the upcoming 9th parliamentary election, the BNP is now giving importance to the grass-roots level leaders and activists opinion in selecting candidates. We have already started traveling to different districts, upazilas, unions and remote areas to extract our grassroots level leaders and activists' views about the nomination of party candidates. BNP must emphasize the grassroots level leaders and activists' opinion. After Eid our organisational activities will go on in full swing," BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan told The Bangladesh Today Expressing anger, the grassroots level leaders and activists told the party central leaders that they would not want to see so-called reformists who were hatching conspiracy in a bid to destroy the BNP immediately after the arrest of Begum Khaleda Zia.

Prices of spices, meat on the rise

Prices of liquid milk and all sorts of meat skyrocketed all on a sudden while prices of Polao rice, pulse, spices, sugar and fish rose significantly at all kitchen markets in the capital and elsewhere in the country as the Eid approaches. However, prices of imported onion, atta and edible oil have come down slightly while that of different varieties of rice and other essentials still remain unchanged in the city markets. As the Eid-ul-Fitr is approaching closer, the prices of beef, mutton and broiler chicken have gone up in city markets and traders said the prices of these items would go up further in city markets. Besides, the price of both loose and packed edible oil

continue to record downward trend and yesterday better quality loose soya oil was selling at Tk 104 per litre and another variety of loose Soya oil was available at Tk 75 per litre.

Hasina-Khaleda dialogue

The proposal for a dialogue between Awami League (AL) president Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has been a much-talked-about issue in the country for the last few weeks. Some people took it seriously with the hope that such a dialogue between the country's two top leaders may contribute positively to resolving the political crisis while some others considered the proposal as a futile exercise given their mindsets and the protracted war of attrition. Meanwhile, the issue has taken a new turn with conflicting comments coming from the government, political parties and the initiator of the move. It is true; many among the people of different sections believe that if the two leaders sit together and try sincerely to resolve the national problems the country would be benefited. But the over enthusiasm of the government side over the proposed meeting has by now created an impression that it wants Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia to sit together and agree jointly to implement certain agenda of the rulers relating to election, the regime's policies and actions since January 2007 and the running of the state after the elections. But as things stands now, the proposed meeting between the two leaders seems more uncertain than ever due to the clashes of political interests of the two feuding ladies and the Emergency Government.

ACC to strengthen a last ditch fight against corrupt politicians

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is set to intensify its legal action against corrupt politicians in a bid to give a last moment impetus in its drive against under-trial corrupt suspects. To implement above plan, the ACC sought assistance of the Attorney General in the matter of those corruption cases of which proceedings have been stayed by the High Court. On September 25, a meeting was held between Attorney General Salahuddin Ahmed and ACC Chairman Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury at the commission's head-office to determine ways as to how the work of government attorneys and ACC panel lawyers will be combined for effective prosecution of corruption cases. In the meeting it was decided to take strong preparation and viable step to fight corruption cases as the hearing on Rules in respect of these cases is scheduled to be held in the High Court after Eid holidays. Meanwhile, sources said ACC's Chairman went to Dr Kamal Hossain's residence to discuss the various issues about the pending corruption cases and seek his legal opinion for effective trial of these cases.

Govt incurs loss of Tk 25.54cr yearly

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is incurring a loss of around Tk 2.89 crore in fitness certificate fees while the amount of loss due to non-payment of tax is over Tk 22.65 crore every year, according to BRTA officials. As many as 44,915 registered vehicles operating in Dhaka and its surrounding areas have not appeared for renewing their fitness certificates for a long time," said a BRTA high official, adding that the amount of fitness certificate fee is Tk 645 while the yearly tax is Tk 5,045 per vehicle. " Terming these vehicles 'fitness defaulter' the BRTA officials said apart from causing frequent accidents in the city, these unfit vehicles are depriving the government of a huge amount of revenue every year. Humayan Rashid Khalifa, director (operations) of BRTA, said, "The number is too high. We are making a loss of great amount of fitness fees. Fitness defaulters are also requested to pay fines if they fail to appear on time. They are not paying the fine as well," adding, even there are some vehicles that did not appear for fitness certificate in last 7-8 years. The fitness defaulters do not pay the yearly tax to the government either, depriving the state coffer of a huge amount of revenue. Yearly fine for fitness default is Tk 1,800 and for tax non-payment fine it is Tk 7,500, a BRTA official said.

KSA assures Bangladeshi workers' welfare

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has promised initiatives to improve the quality of life for Bangladeshis living in the kingdom, an adviser said. During a UNGA sideline meeting in New York between Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal, the latter acknowledged the contribution of Bangladeshi workers in his country and assured welfare measures for them. The foreign adviser proposed setting a minimum wage for expatriate workers in Saudi Arabia. Prince Saud al-Faisal said the proposal would be conveyed to the labour ministry for scrutiny. "We have agreed that both sides will initiate measures to advance the quality of life of the workers and promote their welfare," Iftekhar Ahmed said in a statement issued from New York. "Prince Saud al-Faisal noted with appreciation their contribution," the statement said. Dhaka's concern over the welfare of Bangladeshis in Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, has been raised by recent events highlighting poor working conditions and wages of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Bangladeshis are the largest group of foreign nationals in Saudi Arabia. According to the kingdom, more than 1,765,000 Bangla-deshis live and work there. While the government has been trying to persuade the Saudi government through diplomacy to raise wages, the kingdom has deported hundreds of Bangladeshi workers for violation of local laws.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Bangladesh

The Bangladesh Today issue of 25 September 2008 carried a report that FDI in Bangladesh had fallen by 16 percent over the last one year. This was stated by the World Investment Report which cited political unrests as well as lack of adequate gas and power supply as the main reasons behind such a fall in FDI. The report also stated that Bangladesh has been able to tap into a mere 3.4 percent of the global flow of FDIs. Developing countries are more or less going

crazy over FDI with each state vying with every other to draw in investments from multi-nationals and large business concerns of developed countries. Those states, like India and China, who have the "environment" and the infrastructures, are quite successful in attracting these FDIs in substantial quantities so as to make a positive difference in their economics. As to why this race for FDIs, it's quite simple: developing or less developed states do not have the resources - financial, technological and human - to be able to make a "breakthrough" in their fragile and often doddering economics. Bangladesh, is no exception in this case; in the last two years alone - the last year of the BNP and the first year of the Emergency governments - there have been reports, at least, in the media that large investors such as Tata, Mittal, Abu Dhabi group etc have submitted proposals and are in negotiation with the government for massive investments in the country both in the industrial and service sectors. But all that has come to nothing, the excuses always being that these investors and investments would be inimical to National Interests.

IFC to promote setting up special economic zones

The International Finance Cor-poration (IFC) will promote the move to set up special economic zones across the country for proper utilisation of scarce land through such zoning for industrialisation. Officials of the World Bank's commercial financing arm here on Sunday disclosed the plan of assistance at a workshop on Bangladesh Investment Climate Fund project. They hoped that the proposed special economic zones (SEZ) would have the flexibility to be set up fully in the private sector or under private-public partnership (PPP). "An ordinance on SEZ is now waiting for approval of the government. We hope the SEZs will ensure proper use of land for industrialisation when the country is facing scarcity of land," IFC senior programme manager Syed Akhtar Mahmood told the workshop titled 'Economic Zones: Media Presentation'.

Govt likely to form special body to protect rivers from pollution

The government is likely to constitute a special body in order to protect the country's rivers from severe pollution as contaminated rivers are posing a serious threat to environment and public health. According to sources in the Ministry of Shipping, in the wake of severe river pollution, the government is considering forming a special organisation to ensure pollution-free rivers as almost all rivers of the country have been polluted with toxic waste from different kinds of river-adjacent mills and factories. Besides, peoples' demands for protection of rivers from contamination are being intensified day by day. The proposed body is likely to be named "Buriganga Unnayan Katripakkha" (Buriganga Deve-lopment Authority). Ministry sources said, the 'Taskforce Implementation Com-mittee' on the country's different important rivers, including the Buriganga, proposed the government to form a new body named 'Buriganga

Unnayan Katripakkha' as early as possible to protect the river from pollution, to ensure its navigability and free it from all sorts of encroa-chment in order to save the capital and its dwellers from pollution as well as the country from environmental disaster.

BD seeks unrestricted market access for LDC products

Bangladesh called upon the international community to ensure unrestricted market access for all products of all of the least developed countries (LDCs).
Foreign Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury made the call while addressing Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 77 at the UN headquarters on Friday evening. He said, "The key development deliveries, particularly duty-and quota- free market access and support for productive capacity-building for LDCs, should be pursued expeditiously and comprehensively. Developed countries and developing ones in a position to do so must provide duty-and quota-free market access for all products of all the LDCs, "unilaterally and without discrimination, even before the conclusion of the Doha Round", he told the meet.

AL to launch movement to restore democracy after Hasina's return

Acting Awami League (AL) President Zillur Rahman said that AL would launch fresh movement to restore democracy across the country after the return of Party president Sheikh Hasina in mid October. Terming the rejection of Hasina's bail petition by the High Court as piteous, unbecoming and unexpected, the veteran AL leader said, "This rejection by the honourable court frustrated the whole nation as our leader Hasina has been implicated in false and fabricated cases." Referring to the so-called communal politics of the war criminals and anti-liberation forces, he said, "AL believes in secular democracy. The concept of secularism is not irreligiousness at all. Religion should not be drawn to politics." Bangladesh Islamic Oikya Jote Chairman Misbahur Rahman bitterly criticised the political activities of Jamaat and demanded exemplary punishment of the war criminals. He also called upon the Jamaat to take part in the debate whether they (Jamaat) are any pure Islamic Party.

PDB increases power price by 16 pc for distributing agencies

The government increased bulk electricity tariffs by 16 per cent on average for distributing agencies, which is likely to lead to a raise at retail level too soon.
Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) on Monday approved the power-price hike following an appeal made by the Power Development Board (PDB).
The new tariffs, which will come into effect on October 1, 2008, will not affect the retail-level consumers for the time being. The raise will only be applicable for the power-distributing agencies that buy electricity from PDB and sell to the consumers in their respective command areas. This means the common electricity users will not have to pay any additional charge for the rise in bulk level. The commission gave its approval to the proposal placed by the Power

Development Board in which the state-owned power-generating authority had proposed a 41 per cent raise.

MALDIVES:

POLITICAL:

- Supreme Court declares Gayoom can contest in the Election
- Supreme Court says Anni can contest
- DRP survey shows Gayoom in lead
- Commonwealth Observers will observe the election very closely
- Yamin's come back will boost confidence
- I am not withdrawing: Gasim
- Adalath loses Supreme Court case

SOCIAL:

ECONOMIC:

- CMDA object to liquidating MTDC
- IGMH to be handed to a Singapore company

GEO-STRATEGIC:

Supreme Court says Anni can contest

The Supreme Court has tonight declared presidential candidate of main opposition party MDP Mohamed Nasheed, Anni can contest in October 8 multi-party presidential election. The Court's ruling read by Chief Justice Abdullah Saeed said the acceptance of the candidacy of Mohamed Nasheed, presidential candidate of MDP by the Election Commission was in accordance with the Constitution declaring Nasheed can stand for the election. The court ruled Nasheed was not sentenced on a Hadd offence. The case challenging Nasheed's candidacy was filed by president of youth league of Jumhoory Party Moosa Anwar stating Nasheed was convicted and sentenced for theft which is a hadd offence. Anwar made several arguments to prove Nasheed's offence as one that carried hadd punishment. But lawyers of the Election Commission and Nasheed defended Nasheed showing substantial reasons and evidence to prove Nasheed had not been sentenced on a hadd offence. When the MDP's leader filed his candidacy in the Elections Commission, he submitted a certificate from Criminal Court stating he had not been convicted of a hadd offence.

Supreme Court declares Gayoom can contest in the Election

In a historic session of the Supreme Court this afternoon, the five member top court of the country has declared presidential candidate of the government party DRP president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom can contest the history making October 8 first multi-party presidential election. The Court's ruling read by Chief Justice Abdullah Saeed said the acceptance of the candidacy of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom as the presidential candidate of Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party, DRP was correct and according to the Constitution Maumoon Abdul Gayoom can stand for the election. The case challenging Gayoom's candidacy was filed by Social Liberal Party in which they claimed Gayoom's candidacy endorsed by the Election Commission is a violation of the article 107 of the Constitution and SLP sought a Supreme Court order to invalidate acceptance of Gayoom's candidacy by the Elections Commission. The Supreme Court had earlier completed two hearings on the case in which lawyers representing SLP, Elections Commission and DRP have made strong arguments for their respective parties. SLP was challenging Gayoom on the basis of the limited 2 terms set in the Constitution which their lawyers have said Gayoom has already lapsed during his 30 year rule. But lawyers on behalf of the Elections Commission and Gayoom responded to the challenge by saying the country has received a new Constitution which clearly states anyone can serve two terms under "this Constitution" meaning without any doubt President Gayoom can contest for the presidency.

DRP survey shows Gayoom in lead

The Government party (DRP) has said according to a leaked survey done by the main opposition MDP for their internal use, their presidential candidate Mohamed Nasheed, Anni will be receiving a very low percent of votes in October 8 presidential election, and DRP's presidential candidate incumbent president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom will receive at least 60% of votes according to the same survey and another survey done professionally by DRP. This is very contradictory to the thinking of a large number of people who feel Anni has done the maximum campaigning and will sweep the election by a huge majority. DRP says their surveys are done very professionally and according to those surveys they have not a slightest doubt their leader Gayoom will win the election landslide. DRP has disclosed this in a new briefing by their senior member and presidential spokesman Mohamed Hussain Shareef(Mundhu). DRP is very convinced their leader Gayoom will win the first multi-party presidential elections on 8 October with a landslide in the first round. DRP has also accused MDP as a party under the power and influence of one person, and the party will not make a decision even on minor matter without consulting him. They said MDP will come to complete alert and become allergic with the mention of Sikka. DRP referred to a remark made by their media manager Ali Waheed who mentioned Sikka as Anni's Uncle, and MDP came to alert immediately issuing a statement saying Sikka is not the uncle of Anni, but husband of Anni's Aunt. DRP said though Sikka is not Anni's uncle, the former an uncle like relative of MDP's presidential.

Commonwealth Observers will observe the election very closely

The visiting Commonwealth observer team headed by former Prime Minister of Barbados Owen Arther assured the media they will observe the October 8presidential election very closely and

they will be visiting eight atolls. The team also assured they will give their full cooperation to this historic election. Former Prime Minister Arthur together with other members of the team met and spoke to media person yesterday at Hulhule Island Hotel and explained about their mission in the Maldives. Arthur did not disclose the atolls they would be visiting but said they will be decided later. Responding to a question by a media person on whether the atolls will be decided by the Elections Commission, government or by themselves in the light of the complaints of fraud, vote rigging and other serious irregularities which were common complaints in the past elections, the former prime minister assured they will carry out their mission independently witithout the influence of any person. Answering another question whether he has visited any other small island nation on a similar mission, the former prime minister said he had not undertaken such mission before. The observer team also gave their assurance they will closely monitor the way in which the election is conducted and how voters vote. They said they have not decided about their mission if there was a run off election. In addition to prime minister Arthur, Ebonie Fifita from Pan Commonwealth Youth Caucus, Tonga, James Victor Gbeho former foreign minister of Ghana, B B Tandon, former Chief Election Commissioner of India, Fran Bailey member of Parliament of Australia, Hendrick Gappy, Electoral Commissioner of Seychelles, M I Abdool Rahman, Electoral Commissioner of Mauritius, Hanif Vally, Strategy Adviser, Foundation for Human Rights are in the team

Yamin's come back will boost confidence

Former Trade and higher education minister Abdullah Yamin's coming back to the Cabinet last week as Tourism Minister will boost investor confidence of the industry, says investor and owner of a resort chain. He hails Yamin as a strong and capable leader who will infuse new dynamism in the vital industry. Yamin has much strength including his knowledge experience and decisiveness as he has demonstrated in his 13 years ministerial career, the investor has said. “Yamin has proven his leadership and capabilities during his tenure as Trade and Industries minister, he was one of the most efficient and capable ministers in the cabinet. He feared no one and spoke truth and sense during the period when he was minister, one of the most productive times of President Gayoom's government was from 1993 to 2003, when Yamin was a main stake holder in the government", he elaborated. But during the later years he served in the cabinet, Yamin was not happy and became frustrated over the indecisiveness of the president and many obstructions to result oriented development endeavours. And that was the reason why he left the cabinet and formed his own political party PA. Yamin and his PA team was one of the fearless and vocal debaters in the Majlis, often criticising the government and his brother President Gayoom, he said.

IGMH to be handed to a Singapore company

Health Minister Ilyas Ibrahim has said the main tersary hospital Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, IGMH will be handed to a Singapore company for improving its management and

quality of services. The hospital which is a gift from Indian Government has come under severe criticism of the people for its lapses in providing an efficient and quality service. Minister Ilyas was speaking at the media meeting of DRP yesterday when he elaborated on the issue of achieving a healthy people as mentioned in the manifesto of DRP. He said references made by a presidential candidate about the provision of reasonable health care and availability of doctors but lack of proper management is indication even opposition parties recognise health services in the country are satisfactory. The minister said government has been making all efforts to expand and improve the services of the IGMH, and the decision to enter into an agreement with a Singapore company to manage and run the hospital is the result of these efforts. He mentioned Singapore is one of the countries in the region recognized for its quality health care, and government believes if the management of IGMH is handed to an experienced company from Singapore, this objective can be achieved and IGMH can be developed into a high quality and efficient hospital to provide better health care to the people. Ilyas said he feels such an arrangement will be good in terms of efficiency and expenses. He said he hopes venturing into such an arrangement will enable health care to be provided in the Maldives tothe level of Singapore.

I am not withdrawing: Gasim

Jumhoory Party presidential candidate Gasim Ibrahim has denied rumours floating in the country he was withdrawing from the election. Elaborating on the matter, the billionaire turned politician Gasim has said there is no truth in this story spread by independent presidential candidate Dr. Hasssan Saeed. Gasim said so during a campaign rally in H A Dhidhdhoo yesterday. " What Dr. Hassan is speaking and spreading about me is all lies. There is no truth in that" Gasim said. "What I want to tell Dr. Hassan respectfully is I do not want to withdraw from the race" Gasim said. He further said he has embarked on the reform process because of the government's discrimination and oppression against the people. Anyone who worked for reform was subjected to many difficulties and harassment. I wanted to liberate the country from this oppression. I wanted to work for establishing a government system free and transparent". Gasim said. “The responsibilities and duties of the president is tremendous. The Constitution clearly states what to be done in the event the president becomes incapable of performing his duties. Today it is not possible to handover the leadership of the country like we lease an uninhabited island. We achieved individual freedom on the day this constitution was ratified. That is 7 August 2008. We have to protect and preserve that freedom. We must uphold that freedom. We must never ever allow that freedom to slip away." Gasim spoke about the new freedom and powers given by the constitution.

CMDA object to liquidating MTDC

Capital Market Development Authority, CMDA has objected the recommendation of the Auditor General,AG to liquidate the country's main tourism public company MTDC on the alleged fraud case for illicit trading of shares. In a surprise report issued by Auditor General Ibrahim Naeem on

21 September, he has made disturbing exposure of Villa and Champa, two major private companies owning large control of MTDC's shares. According to AG Villa is in control of 27% and Champa 5% shares of MTDC which the government established to reap the benefits of tourism to the general public. AG has reported buying such large number of shares by these two companies were in violation of the terms of sale of shares and objectives of MTDC. Thus he recommended launching prosecution against the two companies and others involved in the fraud and other irregularities of MTDC. However, CMDA as the concerned regulating agency has made its reservations on this recommendation vide a statement issued.

Adalath loses Supreme Court case

Adalath Party has lost the case they filed in the Supreme Court challenging DRP presidential candidate president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The lawsuit filed by Adalath Party challenged the validity of of the interim Election Commission's decision to accept DRP presidential candidate Gayoom's candidacy. According to Adalath Party, DRP presidential candidate is not eligible to contest the October 8 presidential election. They challenged Gayoom is not a Sunni Muslim which is a requirement to be fulfilled by any presidential candidate. But after two hearings in which the lawyers of Adalath Party, Election Commission and DRP have given their arguments reasons and evidences, the Supreme Court yesterday issued a verdict supporting the decision of the Elections Commission in accepting DRP presidential candidate's candidacy**.**

SRILANKA:

POLITICAL:

- **SLAF targeted LTTE Peace Secretariat and Political Head Office**

SOCIAL:

ECONOMIC:

- **USAID Assists Sri Lanka’s Local Governments in Sanitation Management**
- **BOI signs agreements for hydro power projects with Eagle Power**

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- **Minister Bogollagama briefs Indian counterpart on developments in Sri Lanka**
- **U.S. Condemns Attack on the Residence of the Executive Director of Transparency International Sri Lanka**

SLAF targeted LTTE Peace Secretariat and Political Head Office

Sri Lankan Air force yesterday targeted the LTTE Peace Secretariat and the Political Head Office in Kilinochci. Details of damages are not known yet. It was Norwegian Government which funded huge sum of money, amount undisclosed, to build the LTTE's Peace Secretariat as well as the Political Head Office after signing of the peace agreement between the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE in February 2002. According to reports, Norwegian Government not only funded huge amount of money to build those two buildings, but to date it continues to fund a large sum of money for the running of the Peace Secretariat as well as the political Head office, even after Sri Lanka Government has withdrawn from the peace agreement with LTTE, which was brokered by Norway.

USAID Assists Sri Lanka's Local Governments in Sanitation Management

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Sri Lanka's Ministry of Water and Drainage, and the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government have sponsored a national workshop in Sri Lanka to disseminate best practices in sanitation management. Septic tanks are common throughout Sri Lanka, including urban areas like Colombo. Plugged or overflowing septic tanks compromise water quality and are a primary cause of diarrhea, the fifth-leading cause of hospitalization and third-leading cause of infant deaths in Sri Lanka. Correct maintenance of septic tanks through regular de-sledging, treatment and disposal of seepage are important steps in improving public health, the environment and the economy.

BOI signs agreements for hydro power projects with Eagle Power

The Board of Investment (BOI) of Sri Lanka entered into agreements with Eagle Power and Ithopa Super Trust recently. The ventures are to establish small scale power projects and to undertake seed potato cultivation respectively. Mr. Dhammika Perera, Chairman / Director General signed the agreements on behalf of the BOI and formally presented the BOI Certificate of Registrations to the investors. The hydro power project carried out by Eagle Power (Private) Limited will set up three small scale power plants at Maduru Oya, Sudu Gaga and Kala Wewa.

Minister Bogollagama briefs Indian counterpart on developments in Sri Lanka

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rohitha Bogollagama met with the External Affairs Minister of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, and discussed several issues of bilateral interest, on the sidelines of the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly in New York. Minister Bogollagama outlined the developments in the North of Sri Lanka, in particular the ongoing operations by the security forces to free the civilians in the Vanni from LTTE control, as was successfully accomplished in the Eastern Province. The Minister emphasized that the Government would take every precaution to avoid civilian casualties and that the decision to relocate humanitarian workers in Vavuniya, a new hub for humanitarian operations, which is not far from Kilinochchi, is part of this considered effort.

U.S. Condemns Attack on the Residence of the Executive Director of Transparency International Sri Lanka

United States Embassy in Colombo has condemned the attack on the residence of attorney J.C. Weliamuna, the Executive Director of the Transparency International Sri Lanka."The U.S. Embassy commends Mr. Weliamuna's work as a defender of those who seek to fight corruption, protect the victims of abuse, and advance the cause of human rights in Sri Lanka.

BHUTAN:

POLITICAL:

- Tribals, Muslims attack each other
- PM returns after attending the UN General Assembly in New York

SOCIAL:

- Assam clashes leave more than 30,000 displaced
- Lifestyle diseases double risk of kidney failure

ECONOMIC:

- RICBL to introduce five new insurance schemes

Tribals, Muslims attack each other

At least 33 people have been killed and thousands left homeless in violence over the weekend between tribal people and Bangladeshi settlers in north-east India, police and hospital authorities said. Violence between Bodo tribes-people and immigrant Muslims broke out on Friday in Rowta in Assam state's Udalguri district, about 100 km north of Dispur, the state capital. More than 100 have been injured and 50,000 have fled their homes to take refuge in makeshift camps set up by the police. "Shoot-on-sight orders have been issued and curfew has been imposed in the violence-hit areas," Assam's chief minister Tarun Gogoi said.

Assam clashes leave more than 30,000 displaced

The toll in three days of clashes between two communities in Assam has mounted to 30, more than 100 have been injured, and about 30,000 people have been displaced, officials said. According to updated figures, 30 people were killed so far, 14 of them in separate incidents of police firing, including four yesterday, an Assam home department statement said. A government spokesman said the police and paramilitary troopers Sunday opened fire at three locations to disperse armed mobs trying to set ablaze villages of a rival community in the northern district of Udalguri, about 120km from Assam's main city of Guwahati. At least four

people were killed when the police opened fire on armed miscreants trying to set ablaze a village, a senior police official said requesting not to be named. All the four victims belonged to a minority community. Miscreants yesterday also managed to set ablaze a cluster of homes in the violence-torn district of Udalguri. The violence has spread to the adjoining districts of Darrang and Baksa, the official said. The two districts of Udalguri and Baksa border the Himalayan nation of Bhutan.

PM returns after attending the UN General Assembly in New York

The Prime Minister Lyonchen Jigmi Y Thinley arrived back in Bhutan after attending the UN General Assembly in New York. Upon arrival at the Paro International Airport the Prime Minister was received by cabinet ministers The UN Resident Representative in Bhutan Nicholas Rosellini, representatives from the armed forces and international agencies and officials of Paro Dzongkhag administration were also there to receive the Prime Minister. the sidelines of the session, the Prime Minister Lyonchen Jigmi Y Thinley held bilateral discussions with the heads of government of Australia, Iceland, Nepal, the Netherlands and South Koran.

RICBL to introduce five new insurance schemes

The Royal Insurance Corporation of Bhutan Ltd. (RICBL) is launching new insurance schemes to mark the Coronation and Centenary celebrations. It hopes to launch around five new schemes this year. Some of the schemes were presented to the stakeholders yesterday for discussion. While most of the participants welcomed the overseas travel insurance and the trekking and expedition insurance, many of the participants are skeptical about the health insurance. Speaking to BBS some of the participants said the health insurance scheme will not be able to attract many people since health care is free in the kingdom and there are no private hospitals in the country. “Problems are expected at the initial stage but in the long run the health insurance will be successful since the sustainability of free health care services will be an issue in the future,” said Namgay Lhendrup. A leading insurance company from India is providing the expertise in designing the insurance packages.

Lifestyle diseases double risk of kidney failure

Diabetes and hypertension will become two of the major causes of kidney failure in Bhutan within the next ten years, say doctors. In developing countries like Bhutan today, infection

however is still the major cause of kidney damage. But the rise of non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension has doubled the risk. “If hypertension and diabetes are not tackled, they’ll lead to kidney failure,” said medical specialist and dialysis physician at the Thimphu referral hospital, Dr Tashi Wangdi. He said that about 60 percent of diabetics are likely to suffer from kidney failure. When the dialysis unit opened in Thimphu in 1998, there were only eight patients. Today, there are about 36 patients on dialysis. Dialysis is a process, which filters the blood of its toxic waste. Recognising the attention kidney patients needed, the Thimphu referral hospital started a renal clinic about two weeks ago. Dr Tashi Wangdi said that dialysis is not the best solution for kidney failure. “It’s a bridge therapy while the patient is searching for a donor.”

MYANMAR:

POLITICAL:

- Protest yields to lethargy in Myanmar

SOCIAL:

ECONOMIC:

- FAO to extend cyclone aid project period for Myanmar
- Thai Life Insurance Company

FAO to extend cyclone aid project period for Myanmar

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations will extend the period of its Myanmar cyclone aid project for another six months to run until next year, Flower News reported. Some 33.5 million U.S. dollars of fund for the extended project are being sought; the FAO resident representative was quoted as saying.

Protest yields to lethargy in Myanmar

. Myanmar is a country of uncommon beauty, full of dilapidated colonial structures slowly crumbling amid the damp swelter of the tropics, each surface and crevice losing ground to the organic pastels of mosses and molds. At night, on low stools beneath the crowded umbrellas of Yangon's center-city tea shops, men sit closely and strum loud acoustic folk melodies, their songs filled with tradition rather than protest. Usually, the only things exploding are the stall piles of papayas, pineapples and mangoes in the heat. One year ago a social upheaval, sparked by a rise in fuel prices, inspired hope that a chapter would be closing on the world's longest-running military regime. But the Buddhist clergy and common citizens were quickly beaten back with batons and bullets, and the world moved on.

Thai Life Insurance Company

A Thai Life Insurance Company is likely to pay compensation of Baht 100,000 for each of the 54 Burmese nationals who died of asphyxiation in a ten-wheel container truck in Ranong district, southern Thailand while sneaking into Thailand illegally. On April 9 this year, 121 migrant workers illegally entered Thailand in a deep freezer container vehicle of whom 54 died of asphyxiation. Now it is learnt that the Thai Insurance Company 'Liberty Insurance' is likely to pay compensation of Baht 100,000 for those who died. "The Ranong lower court has passed the order in accordance with the law. The compensation has come about mainly due to Thai lawyers and NGOs here who in cooperation did the job," Ko Htoo Chit, Director of Thai based Basic Human Rights Education Institute, told Mizzima.

Nepal:

POLITICAL:

- Maoists demands fresh general convention in Nepal
- President Yadav reiterates need for unity, communal harmony in Nepal
- Terai groups expect "meaningful" talks with Nepali gov't
- Nepal announces amnesty for political prisoners
- Democratic deficiencies of Nepal's political parties

SOCIAL:

- Four hurt in Nepal mosque blast
- Powerful explosion
- 2 killed, 29 injured in road accidents in Nepal
- Koshi flood victims launch protest demanding fresh handouts for festival
- Himalayan Blues Festival 2008 around the corner

ECONOMIC:

- Food insecurity intensifies in the wake of floods

Powerful explosion

At least six people were injured when a powerful explosion ripped through a mosque in south-eastern Nepal, media reports said Sunday. The blast targeted the mosque at Hattimuda village in Morang district, about 400 km south-east of the capital, during evening prayers Saturday, the Kathmandu Post newspaper reported. The newspaper said unidentified assailants lobbed the bomb into the mosque and fled. The mosque was packed with people and most of the wounded sustained shrapnel injuries.

There were no immediate claims of responsibility for the attack. The Muslim minority make up less than 5 percent of Nepal's 28 million population, and live predominantly in pockets of southern Nepal bordering India.

President Yadav reiterates need for unity, communal harmony in Nepal

Nepal President Dr Ram Baran Yadav has reiterated the need to bolster national unity and communal harmony for peace and prosperity in the country. Addressing a mass gathering following a concert programmes organised by Republicans Artistes Forum at Dashrath Stadium here on Saturday, Dr. Yadav called for political unity and cooperation in order to sustain peace and democracy. He said that Nepal could become a rich country if the resources available here were utilised and distributed in a scientific manner. Constituent Assembly chairman Subas Nemwang, Chief Justice Kedar Prasad Giri, ministers, and leaders of different political parties were also present on the occasion.

Maoists demands fresh general convention in Nepal

Maoist leaders have demanded that a fresh general convention of the party to be held in order to consolidate the revolutionary zeal in Nepal. Responding to the political report presented by Prime Minister Prachanda at the central committee meeting of the party, the leaders agreed with his conclusion that the party has met with success in its policies and strategies since the beginning of peace process. They also raised concerns about the need to protect the revolutionary spirit in the party.

2 killed, 29 injured in road accidents in Nepal

Two people were killed and 29 others injured in separate accidents in different parts of Nepal on Sunday, reported the local media house's website eKantipur.

Two died and over 10 were injured when a passenger bus met withan accident near Kaluwapur in the Mahendranagar-Dhangadi Highway in Kailali district, situated some 470 km of western Nepal on Sunday. The bus packed with Nepalis returning home from India to celebrate the country's greatest festival Dashain was heading to Nepalgunj, 365 km west of Kathmandu.

Terai groups expect "meaningful" talks with Nepali gov't

Over a dozen underground Terai outfits active in southern Nepal's Terai plains said there was possibility of dialogue with the government if the latter pledges to make it "meaningful", local news website eKantipur reported. After reportedly holding discussions among themselves at an undisclosed location in the Indian state of Bihar recently, the Terai groups made the remark on Saturday in Sunsari district, some220 km south of Nepali capital Kathmandu. The talks team comprises Minister for Peace and

Reconstruction Janardan Sharma from the leading Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)(CPN-M) as coordinator, and Minister for Local Development Ram Chandra Jha from the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) and Minister for Education Renu Yadav from the Madhesi People's Rights Forum (MPRF) as members.

Four hurt in Nepal mosque blast

Four people have been injured in a small bomb blast at a mosque in southeast Nepal. Policewho are looking for the culprits say there was no major damage to the mosque in Biratnagar. Majority-Hindu Nepal has little history of religious conflict with minority Muslims. Two people were killed in a similar blast on a mosque in the same region in March, an attack owned by a little-known group called the Nepal Defense Army.

Himalayan Blues Festival 2008 around the corner

The end of Dashain is going to start the vibes of Blues Music in Kathmandu with the Himalayan Blues Festival 2008, an annual event with international and local musicians performing from 15th to 19th October. Some of the musicians include Pugsley Buzzard, Owen Campbell and Jonno Zilber from Australia, Kenn Lending from Denmark, Chris Schreiner Project from the USA and local bands like Looza, Jocose and others. The different venues for Festival include Patan Durbar Museum, Garden of Dreams, 1905 Restaurant, Walter Restaurant, Bar at Babar Mahal Revisited and various other junctions like Salt n Pepper, Bhumi and Dela Soul. This event is presented by "Blue Music Room" and its supporters include Nepalnews.com, Signature, Tuborg, US Embassy, Nepal Tourism Board, Nepal Music Center, Dwarikas's Hotel, Audio Active Studio and others.

Koshi flood victims launch protest demanding fresh handouts for festival

Hundreds of families displaced by the recent floods caused by a breach in Koshi River embankment in Sunsari district have launched protest, demanding fresh handouts including cash so that they would be able to celebrate Dashain festival in their own small way. The flood victims of some of the worst affected parts blocked the main highway in Sunsari district on Saturday, protesting lack of prompt assistance from the government. The flood victims have complained that the two installments of cash handouts of Rs 700 rupees and Rs 1000 from the government, recently, were too little to meet their need during the festival, reports said. They have announced that the agitation would go on until the government comes up with fresh cash handouts.

Nepal announces amnesty for political prisoners

In a bid to lure armed groups operating in the country's south to the negotiating table, Nepal's government announced Saturday it will free all political prisoners in the country. "We also appeal to all armed groups to come to the negotiating table," Krishna Bahadur

Mahara, communication minister in the Maoist-led coalition, government said. Dozens of armed groups have been waging small-scale wars in the Madhes -- the country's southern area bordering India -- since the Maoists ended their 10-year insurgency and joined a peace process in 2006. Several of the groups were initially a part of the Maoist insurgency but later split with them. The Maoists, whose insurgency cost the country more than 13,000 lives, pledged after they were voted in as the country's largest party in the April election that they are against political violence and are committed to competitive multiparty democracy.

Democratic deficiencies of Nepal's political parties

The current ruling coalition of Nepal may fail anytime if it is not build upon minimum commonalities. If the CPN-Maoist and CPN-UML can unite in a loose alliance adhering to the basic tenets of democracy in view of the long term perspective, these two Nepal's left parties could offer voters a social democratic form of government, and simultaneously achieve their goals of building an inclusive democracy.

Food insecurity intensifies in the wake of floods

Nepal's precarious food security situation is being tested after heavy flooding over the past two months in both the east and west of the country left almost 250,000 people displaced. Nearly 33 out of 75 districts in the country are chronically food insecure, with more than six million or 20 percent of the total population vulnerable, of whom 2.5 million are in immediate need of food assistance, according to the UN World Food Programme (WFP). More than 60,000 people were displaced in Sunsari District after the Koshi River, Nepal's largest, burst its banks on 18 August. Barely one month later torrential rains resulted in heavy flooding in the west of the Himalayan nation, displacing over 180,000, mostly in Kailali and Kanchanpur in the Terai (flatlands in south Nepal).

Business and Politics in Muslim World

India

Sadia Khanum

27th September to 3rd October 2008

Presentation: 10th October 2008

Political front:

- Manmohan soft on terror: BJP
- If Tata pulls out, Trinamool will be solely responsible: CM
- AIFB threatens to pull out from Cabinet
- Advani seeks Muslim support
- Don't rush into FTA with European Union: CPI(M)
- Three parties to merge with AGP
- UPA should resign : Swamy
- India to fight terrorism resolutely: PM
- Nuclear deal puts India in blind trap: BJP
- Advani condemns attacks, calls for inter-religious talks
- Farmers to be top priority if NDA is voted to power: Advani
- Timing of Nanavati report not for electoral gain: Narendra Modi
- Efforts are on to forge third front: N Chandrababu Naidu
- Mamata meets Sonia, asks for Centre's help

Domestic situation:

- Blast in Delhi again, two killed
- Communal violence continues in Orissa
- Christians protest attacks by Hindus in India
- Wanted: Leaders for the Muslim community
- Six arrested for Agartala blasts
- Fresh violence in Kandhamal, curfew reimposed

- Attacks on churches spread to Tamil Nadu
- Bajrang Dal involved in Karnataka communal violence: Home Ministry
- Jealousy has prompted attacks: Christian priest
- India stampede 'caused by false rumours of bomb'
- Bangladeshis will outnumber Marathis in Mumbai, warns BJP leader

Economic Front:

- No ground for agitation in Uttarakhand: Tata Motors
- Data theft more common in India, China
- Ford sets early 2010 target to launch small car in India
- Tatas pull out Nano project from Singur

Geo-strategic developments:

- Condoleezza Rice bats for India
- U.S. House approves nuclear deal with India
- France will launch civil n-coop with India: Sarkozy
- India says historical wrong stands corrected with the N deal
- Senate approves US-India nuclear deal
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Political front

Manmohan soft on terror: BJP

Within hours of the blast in the Mehrauli area of the capital, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accused the Prime Minister of being soft on terror for the sake of vote-bank politics. Condemning the blast, BJP spokesman Rajiv Pratap Rudy sought to draw attention to the irony that the blast took place even as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was calling for a campaign against terrorism, at the United Nations General Assembly. Expressing concern over the fact that the capital had come under terror attack for the second time in a month, Mr. Rudy said it was high time the government stopped debating and discussing terrorism, and began acting against it.

If Tata pulls out, Trinamool will be solely responsible: CM

"We are trying our best to convince Tata Motors not to pull out of the State, but if the violence by the Trinamool Congress continues in its present form, the company may leave soon," West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said.The Trinamool Congress will be solely responsible if the Tata Motors decide to pullout from the Singur small car project and it will be a betrayal on the part of the Opposition to the people of West Bengal.

AIFB threatens to pull out from Cabinet

The All-India Forward Bloc, a major constituent of the ruling Left Front in West Bengal, has threatened to pull out its Ministers from the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee Cabinet if the government does not withdraw its directive on renewal of German company Metro Cash and Carry's licence by September 30. The FB has four Ministers in the Cabinet.

Advani seeks Muslim support

Senior BJP leader L.K. Advani reacted sharply to the Mehrauli blast in Delhi, accusing the UPA government of being unable to tackle terrorism, and underlining the need for strong anti-terror laws. "This government cannot tackle terrorism," he said as he was informed about the blast while speaking at a party rally here. Raising the issue of building a Ram temple at Ayodhya, he said, "I was arrested during my last yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. Till I reach Ayodhya again and build a Ram temple there I will not be satisfied." "It would be nice if our Muslim brothers also support us. If they take back the case and state that the matter is needlessly pending for years...this is the Ram Janambhoomi (birth place of Lord Ram) and a temple should be built here."

Don't rush into FTA with European Union: CPI (M)

Ahead of the ninth India-European Union Summit in Marseille, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Saturday asked the United Progressive Alliance Government not to make any commitment on the Free Trade Agreement without a debate in Parliament. India was not required to make any commitment in areas such as competition policy, Intellectual Property Rights and public procurement in the World Trade Organisation Doha Round, which seemed to be part of the India-EU FTA. It was also clear that the huge agricultural subsidies provided by the EU, which has been one of the major roadblocks in the WTO Doha Round, were not being discussed in the India-EU FTA. The CPI (M) cautioned that with the future of the Doha Round looking bleak, the trade liberalisation agenda was sought to be pushed through FTAs with advanced economies, which could hardly offer a level-playing field for a developing country like India. "In fact, such FTAs can turn out to be much more damaging for the livelihoods of Indian farmers, workers and other sections of the working people than the WTO agreements."

Three parties to merge with AGP

Three Assam parties have decided to merge with the Asom Gana Parishad(AGP) with the objective of going to the polls for the Lok Sabha as a united regional force to defeat the Congress and capture power in the State in 2011. The merger of the AGP (Pragatisheel) headed by the former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the Trinamool Gana Parishad (TGP) and the Prabin Deka faction of the Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad(PLP) with the AGP is scheduled for October 14, its foundation day. While the TGP and the PLP gave their consent for merger on Thursday, the AGP (Pragatisheel) conveyed its willingness during a meeting with an 11-member AGP Committee on Unification on Friday. There was some hitch over a resolution adopted at the recent AGP General House meeting, by which the party decided not to give top posts for three years to newcomers. The three parties expressed reservations about this resolution, saying it would not be win-win for them after merger. However, the AGP clarified that top posts meant only party president and Leader of the Opposition; hence the leaders of three parties would be accommodated in respectable positions.

UPA should resign: Swamy

The Janata Party president, Subramanian Swamy, demanded the immediate resignation of the UPA government and holding of elections to the Lok Sabha. He said the government had failed to prevent terrorist acts even in the national capital. The time had come for the people to elect a strong patriotic government to replace the present one, he said.

India to fight terrorism resolutely: PM

On Board PM's Special Aircraft, Sept 28 (PTI) Anguished by the Mehrauli blast, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today said the government will fight terrorism resolutely and will tighten intelligence gathering, investigation and prosecution process. It is "most unfortunate" that the incident took place, Singh said referring to Saturday's explosion in Mehrauli in South Delhi which killed at least two people and left 22 others injured.

Nuclear deal puts India in blind trap: BJP

BJP on Thursday said India has entered into a blind trap and finally acceded to the nuclear non-proliferation regime with the Indo-US nuclear deal. "The government has gone for a blind trap knowingly and can't get out of it. We have acceded to the nuclear non-proliferation regime with the Indo-US nuclear deal," BJP spokesperson Rajiv Pratap Ruddy said. "The deal has been done at the cost of the country's sovereignty and nuclear independence. It's a time to worry but the Congress bosses are going tom-tom on their sense of pseudo achievement," he added. During 38 months of negotiation, the Prime Minister could not clarify even once about the deal's influence on our nuclear test, while the American side has been amply clear that any test after the deal would be a big no, he added.

Advani condemns attacks, calls for inter-religious talks

BJP's prime ministerial candidate L K Advani condemned attacks on Christians and churches in Orissa and Karnataka. Advani pledged to ask the BJP-ruled states to ensure there were no more attacks on Christians. He said inter-religious dialogue should be initiated to strengthen the bond of "Indianness". "The inter-religious dialogue should be frank and constructive. Let people belonging to all religious groups consciously strengthen the bonds of Indian ness that tie us together," he said.

Farmers to be top priority if NDA is voted to power: Advani

Senior BJP leader L K Advani assured that if voted back to power at the Centre, the NDA would give top priority to the interests of farmers in the country.Addressing a mammoth public meeting "Vijay Sankalp", Advani criticised the Centre for neglecting farmers all these days. Pointing at load-shedding for several hours, pending irrigation projects and inadequate prices to cotton producers, he said these were utter failures of the UPA government, which brought distress to the farmers in the country. NDA would set up a national board for improving facilities at all important pilgrimage centres across the country, he said in the wake of stampede in Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Timing of Nanavati report not for electoral gain: Narendra Modi

Defending the timing of the Nanavati Commission report, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has claimed the findings were not intended for electoral gains. "The best timing of the report for me would have been before the assembly polls Lok Sabha elections are still six months away," he said. "When Nanavati Commission presents a report on the anti-Sikh riots it is acceptable to the Congress, but when it submits a report on Gujarat, it is criticised," he told

Efforts are on to forge third front: N Chandrababu Naidu

Efforts to forge a third alternative of both the Congress and the BJP would continue despite some recent setbacks, Telugu Desam Party president N Chandrababu Naidu said."We want a strong alternative of the Congress and the BJP. We have formed the UNPA but some parties like the AIADMK and Samajwadi Party have left us. But we shall continue our efforts to make the Third Front a reality," Chandrababu Naidu asserted.

Mamata meets Sonia, asks for Centre's help

Giving clear hints of closer coordination, Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee took her case against West Bengal's Left government to Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday and sought the Centre's intervention in the state by invoking Article 355. During the half-hour meeting the Trinamool leader accused the state government of going back on the agreement mediated by Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi and said that the Singur situation demanded immediate central intervention. Sonia, according to Mamata, expressed concern over the fate of the farmers whose land had been acquired for the Tata small car project. To the political observers, Mamata's meeting with the Congress chief acquired significance because of the approaching elections. After the Congress-Left ties broke down over the nuclear deal the possibility of an alliance with Trinamool seems to have brightened up.

Domestic situation:

Blast in Delhi again, two killed

Exactly a fortnight after a series of five blasts rocked the Capital, a bomb exploded in the crowded Mehrauli area of South Delhi on Saturday, claiming the lives of a nine-year-old boy and a 60-year-old unidentified man. Nearly two dozen people were injured. The police believe that the blast is not linked to the September 13 explosions. However, a red alert has been sounded in the Capital.

Communal violence continues in Orissa

Communal violence continued in the interior areas of Orissa's Kandhamal district on Saturday even as Chief Minister visited Phulbani, the district headquarters town to take stock of the situation. One church was burnt at Kupaguda village under G. Udaygiri block of the district during the morning hours. Also many houses were burnt down in Kiramal village under G. Udaygiri area and Lamangia village under Raikia block. Reports indicated that around 50 houses were burnt down in Rajenpanga village under Daringbadi police station limits on Friday night. The areas witnessing more violence include Raikia, G. Udaygiri and Tikabali blocks.

Christians protest attacks by Hindus in India

Hundreds of Christians held a rally Sunday in the Indian capital to protest recent attacks by Hindu hard-liners that have left dozens of Christians dead and thousands homeless in several

Indian states. About 400 Christians gathered in a New Delhi park to pray and listen to speeches in which community leaders urged the government to do more to protect the country's religious minorities. "We are quite disappointed with both the federal government and state governments as violence against Christians has spread to several states in the past month," said Dominic Emmanuel, a spokesman for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. The clashes between Hindus and Christians started in the Kandhamal district of Orissa state on Aug. 24 following the killing of a Hindu religious leader. At the time, police blamed Maoist rebels active in the area, but right-wing Hindu groups blamed local Christians and set fire to a Christian orphanage. The violence then worsened to include mob attacks on churches, shops and homes.

Wanted: Leaders for the Muslim community

CVs are awaited for vacancies not filled for years: the Muslim community is looking for leaders. India's 15 crore Muslims, the country's second largest religious community, are in the midst of its worst social churning since independence. Muslims are repeatedly being blamed for terror attacks and fingers being pointed at the larger community for acts blamed on a few Muslims. But there is no one to lead it, and the aspirants are squabbling among themselves. The community is frustrated and angry. "There won't be Muslim leadership in the country for another 50 years. Don't we have the Muslim League? It struggles to win one MP seat in Kerala," said Arshad Siddiqui, founder president of Mumbai's Crescent Society of India. Many Muslims are frustrated and angst-ridden, feeling the vacuum of a strong leadership that could defend the community against stereotyping and urge introspection and dialogue within.

Six arrested for Agartala blasts

Six persons were arrested in connection with a string of five blasts that rocked the city killing two people and wounding 100 others last night, police said on Thursday. It is yet to be ascertained who were behind the blasts but there was no doubt that a strong network and a lot of planning had gone behind it, Das said, adding it was not known if remote control was used to trigger the blasts which occurred in a space of five minutes.

Fresh violence in Kandhamal, curfew reimposed

Curfew was reimposed in nine major locations in Kandhamal on Wednesday amid fresh attacks on Christian prayer halls in some parts of the riot-ravaged district. Police, for the first time since the violence erupted, arrested a number of saffron leaders of the region, giving rise to tension and protests in different areas.

Attacks on churches spread to Tamil Nadu

After Orissa, Karnataka and Kerala, attacks on churches have spread to Tamil Nadu, with suspected Hindu activists damaging a statue of Baby Jesus in Dharmapuram town in Erode district in the southern part of the state. The attack in Erode came as fresh instances of desecration of church property were reported from neighbouring Kerala. As in Orissa and Karnataka, where ire against conversions was directed wantonly against all orders and churches belonging to denominations which had traditionally not been involved in conversion, Hindu activists in Kerala have also expanded the violence to include Catholic churches. In Tamil Nadu, it was the fourth attack on church property. TN chief minister M Karunanidhi warned that strict action would be taken against the attackers

Bajrang Dal involved in Karnataka communal violence: Home Ministry

The fresh missive to Orissa came on a day when a Central team, which visited Karnataka on a fact-finding mission in the wake of violence against the Christian community, indicted Bajrang Dal for vandalizing churches, prayer halls and schools and pointed out that lapses on the part of the police and the local administration could aggravate the situation further. Although the team in its report to the home ministry mentioned that the state remained has peaceful in the past four days, it highlighted that there was a "sense of uneasiness" in Karnataka and the Christian community was "visibly upset and unhappy" over the recent communal violence there. Special secretary (internal security) M L Kumawat, who led the two-member team to Karnataka, said: "Alleged Bajrang Dal elements were involved in vandalising churches, prayer halls and schools."

Jealousy has prompted attacks: Christian priest

Seventy-year-old Sankirtan Digal of Gadragaon in Kandhmal's Chakapada block got drawn towards Christianity when he was young. However, communal tensions in 1970 made him "reconvert" to Hinduism. But he did not stop visiting the church. His children, too, prayed to Christ, leaving Sankirtan and his family at odds with the Hindus of the village. Today, his family lives in a relief camp in Bhubaneswar in the aftermath of the anti-Christian violence that engulfed Kandhmal in August. Sankirtan is now contemplating revisiting temples. Like him, Gadadhar Digal, 75, too is going back to being a Hindu. "We can no longer live in Gadragaon without accepting Hinduism," said Gadadhar, fear writ on his face. "We want to save our lives. What difference does temple or church make?" asked Sankirtan. But why did they leave Hinduism for Christianity in the first place? "Christian missionaries invited us to the church and we felt nice. So we changed our religion," both maintained. But Kartik Behera of the same village has a different take: "Churches give people money and free health care and education. Therefore, many like Sankirtan and Gadadhar converted to Christianity." "Those who become Christians wear better clothes. They tend to adopt officer-like lifestyle," said Nanda Gonda, a Hindu of Gadragaon, whose children turned Christians. But an agitated RSS worker of the area

says, "Hundreds of crores of rupees from foreign Christian organizations are being pumped into Kandhmal every year. After all, how else would they be able to build big buildings for churches and other institutions?" The "socio-economic gains" in the form of access to missionary-run educational institutions in Kandhmal and elsewhere, better health care, jobs in churches and other institutions for the converts is a major cause for heartburn among local Hindus. And while most church-goers don't admit they have benefited financially from converting to Christianity, they accept their economic status has improved over the past few years. "We've worked hard to improve our economic condition. This has made others jealous," says Ranjit Naik, a pastor of Barakhama village in Baliguda area. Naik, originally a Dalit, belonged to the Pana community, a sub-caste of Hinduism, but like thousands of other Panas of Kandhmal, he practices Christianity. "Treated as untouchables, we weren't allowed to enter temples. Christianity gave us a new identity," said Kamal Digal of Barakhama.

"Why should we be part of a religion that doesn't recognize us as human beings? We will die but not become Hindus again," he said.

India stampede 'caused by false rumours of bomb'

Witnesses say the stampede that killed at least 168 people at a Hindu temple in western India on 1st October was caused by a false rumour about a bomb. The disaster happened just as the doors of the temple were being opened at dawn to admit more than 12,000 people celebrating a Hindu festival in the city of Jodhpur. Tensions are currently high in India following a string of recent bomb attacks blamed on both Muslim and Hindu extremists.

Bangladeshis will outnumber Marathis in Mumbai, warns BJP leader

Former BJP MP from Mumbai, Kirit Somaiya, warned on Tuesday at a press that the alarming growth of migrant workers infiltrating into the city from Bangladesh, over the last three decades, has exposed Mumbai to the danger of being usurped by the Bangladeshi Muslims. Based on evaluation from the subsequent census reports of the Government of India from 1971 to 2001, he said the Hindu growth was 19% in the last 20 years while the Muslim-Bangladeshis growth was almost doubled to 38%. According to Somaiya the total population of Hindus in Mumbai City District was 21.19 lakh and that of Muslim-Bangladeshis was 7.34 lakhs. Out of the total population of 33.38 lakh, Muslim-Bangladeshis accounted for 22% in the Mumbai City District. The purpose behind bringing this study was to urge the establishment to save Mumbai from becoming Bangladeshi Mumbai, he said. "There is an urgent need to study the growth of Bangladeshis population in Mumbai - how they are coming in and getting settled down, the manner in which they are getting various documents, how do they get themselves registered on the government records etc," said Somaiya. However, Mr Somaiya only listed the Hindu growth (and not any other community like Sikhs, Muslims, Christians etc) from the government's census

report. As for the Bangladeshi migration to the city he termed it as "Muslim Bangladeshis" only, ignoring the fact that there may be Hindus from the neighbouring state who could be migrating to India. The report could also be a subtle attempt to sound wake up call to those who are opposing their own country men from living and working peacefully in Mumbai. In the last few months, Mumbai has seen vitiating and violent attacks from the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena on migrant workers of UP and Bihar, in order to oust them from Maharashtra.

Economic Front:

No ground for agitation in Uttarakhand: Tata Motors

Tata Motors said the Uttarakhand government had given its own 1,000-acre land to the company and it has set up manufacturing facilities on it, Reacting to reports that a group of farmers was planning an agitation if more land is given to the company for setting up the Nano car project, facing uncertainty in West Bengal, a Tata Motors spokesperson said: "All our land has come from the government and the plant exists on government land."

Data theft more common in India, China

Enterprises in emerging countries including China, India and Brazil where IT adoption is at a nascent stage are more prone to loss of company data and other sensitive information due to flouting of company rules by employees. Even though the behavioral risks of employees behind the data loss are common across different countries, certain practices that result in a serious breach of company policies are more common in China and India, according to a recent study by US-based market research firm Insight Express. Employees in this region, for instance, carry company data on portable devices and alter the security settings on work devices to access unauthorized websites.

Ford sets early 2010 target to launch small car in India

Armed with a $500-million investment outlay, Ford Motors has set early 2010 as the target to launch a small car in India, start its new engine-making unit and double the assembly line capacity, a top official said here. The US-based giant will also unveil its refurbished Ikon by next month to expand its range of offerings in the country that includes Fusion, Endeavour and Fiesta, said Michael Boneham, managing director and president of Ford India.

Tatas pull out Nano project from Singur

Tatas on Friday pulled out of West Bengal for its Rs 1-lakh car Nano project, blaming it on the continuing agitation by the Opposition parties, spearheaded by Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee. Addressing the media after meeting with Chief Minister Budhadeb Bhattacharjee, Ratan Tata, however, said that Nano will come out as per the committed time.

"Nano will come on time. We will make make-shift arrangement to meet deadline," Tata said. "There was little choice but move out of Singur, he said. The move has been prompted after taking into account issues such as well-being of its employees at the project and safety of contractors as well as that of its vendors. The persisting agitation by the opposition parties has been the sole reason behind the decision to pull out the project, he said.

Geo-strategic developments:

Condoleezza Rice bats for India

The 123 agreement is expected to be inked during U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's daylong visit to New Delhi on October 3. Ms. Rice, whose visit has been pending for over a year mainly because of uncertainty over the nuclear deal, will hold talks with External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee on bilateral and regional issues. The two leaders will sign the nuclear agreement if it gets the expected clearance from the U.S. Congress by then, sources said here.

U.S. House approves nuclear deal with India

The U.S. House of Representatives approved on Saturday a civilian nuclear agreement that will put an end to the three-decade ban on American nuclear trade with India. The agreement, passed by a 298-117 vote in the House, is yet to be approved by the Senate. The agreement, passed by a 298-117 vote in the House, is yet to be approved by the Senate.

France will launch civil n-coop with India: Sarkozy

Even as the Indo-US nuclear deal is making its passage in the US Congress, French President Nicolas Sarkozy today made clear his country's intention to forge ahead with the civil nuclear cooperation with India which will be sealed in an agreement he is signing with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Paris. France, the world's leading country in nuclear power which produces 80 per cent of electricity from atomic energy, is ready to offer its latest EPR technology to India under the agreement. India and France initialed the Framework Agreement for Civil Nuclear Cooperation in January but could not sign it pending a waiver from the 45-nation Nuclear

Suppliers Group. With the NSG giving its nod, the two leaders will sign the agreement during Singh's visit to Paris.

India says historical wrong stands corrected with the N deal

Asserting that the smooth passage of the Indo-US nuclear deal in the US Congress was a vindication of its stand, India on Thursday said the step had corrected a "historical wrong". "A truly historical moment in terms of ending the long, long isolation of India not just in terms of nuclear commerce but in terms of high-technology denial," Indian ambassador to the US Ronen Sen said after the deal cleared its last legislative hurdle is the Senate. "A sense of vindication for India and a correction of a historic wrong," he said.

Senate approves US-India nuclear deal

The US Senate on Wednesday approved a landmark deal ending a three-decade ban on US nuclear trade with India, handing a victory to President George W Bush on one of his top foreign policy priorities. Final approval came as the Senate voted to ratify the deal, 86-13, sending the legislation to Bush to sign into law.

Rice warns of "most serious consequences" if India tests again

The landmark India-US civil nuclear deal received a resounding 86-13 approval from the Senate, but not before Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had assured that a nuclear test by India will result in "most serious consequences". As the Senate began a debate on the approval legislation on Wednesday Rice sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid saying the Bush Administration would prefer a "clean legislation" with no fresh amendments, but also held out an assurance that a test by India would entail automatic cut-off of US cooperation besides several other sanctions.

Despite Pak protest, Army launches civilian trek to Siachen

Notwithstanding Pakistan's vociferous protests, Indian Army on Wednesday launched a civilian mountaineering and trekking expedition to the forbidding Siachen Glacier for the second year in a row. The 21-day expedition is meant to show to the international community that Indian troops hold the 72-km-long Siachen Glacier in the Saltoro Ridge region of Jammu and Kashmir, and Pakistan was nowhere near it. However, the aim of the trekking trip for 42 civilians including women, journalists, DRDO scientists, and Defence personnel is to promote adventure tourism among civilian youth of the country, army sources said. Defence Minister A K Antony will flag off the expedition from Leh on October 7, when the actual trekking of the glacier would begin. The expedition team would comprise personnel from IAF, Navy, DRDO, Defence Accounts, Rastriya

Indian Military College, Indian Mountaineering Federation, prominent Ladakh citizens, journalists and dependents of army personnel from the Northern Command, the sources said. The civilian Siachen expedition last September had run into a controversy after Pakistan lodged a strong protest, calling it "incongruous" to the ongoing peace efforts with India. Though the army halted the trip immediately after the protest, it went ahead with the trekking expedition after a go-ahead signal was given by the UPA government. Despite protests from Pakistan, India maintains that it does not need its neighbour's approval to send trekkers to Siachen Glacier that was "essentially an Indian territory" west of the 110-km-long Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL). In June-July this year, the army had taken out another expedition to the Khatling glacial heights on the Indo-Tibetan border in Uttarakhand "to leave telltale signs of Indian Army's presence there, essentially to show to the world that it belonged to India" and to counter any future claim by China.

India enhances anti-submarine warfare capability

Even as Pakistan prides itself as the first South Asian country to commission into service a diesel-electric submarine, PNS Hamza, which has an air-independent propulsion system, India is on the threshold of perfecting its indigenous state-of-the-art underwater surveillance mechanism as part of its Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) programme. Nagan, the low frequency active-cum-passive towed array sonar system developed by the Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL), Kochi, with support from industrial partners such as Bharat Electronics (BE), Larsen and Toubro (L&T), Uniflex Cables and Keltron, is in the advanced stage of user evaluation trials. Presently, the Navy operates passive only towed array sonar system from Thales (France) onboard a few platforms such as INS Mumbai, a Delhi-class guided missile destroyer.“Nagan marks a major technological breakthrough as it is capable of long-range detection. It is meant for fitment onboard surface ships,” NPOL Director S. Ananthanarayanan told.

LCA to be fitted with Israeli multi-mode radar

The indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas will, after years of delay, soon be fitted with its primary mission sensor, the multi-mode radar (MMR). P.S. Subramaniam, Programme Director, Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA), the defence laboratory that is designing the LCA, told that “airworthy units” of the Israeli – manufactured MMR would be arriving here early next week for integration into the aircraft. The Elta designed and developed MMR, Elta EL/M-2052 which will be an interim option since India is developing an indigenous one, has already undergone tests on the flight test bed and ground rig in Israel. One of the most crucial pieces of equipment on any fighter aircraft, the MMR determines the operational effectiveness of the machine, with no fighter aircraft being in a position to perform as one without an MMR. In the LCA the MMR’s primary role will be to detect and locate targets, process the information, lock on the target and pass this input to the mission computer. From the mission computer this information will be utilized by the pilot as he contemplates weapon release activity. The MMR will also create ground and contour maps when selected.

Kashmir

Congress for early polls in J&K: Azad

Congress said it wanted restoration of the democratic process in Jammu and Kashmir as soon as possible as the Governor's rule there cannot fulfill aspirations of the people. "Election should be held as soon as possible. Democratic process should be restored," Congress leader and former Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said. Jammu and Kashmir was brought under Governor's rule and the state assembly dissolved on July 10, three days after Azad resigned as Chief Minister without facing a confidence vote on the floor of the House following withdrawal of support by coalition partner PDP.

Situation in J&K not conducive for polls: Omar

The National Conference (NC) said situation in Jammu and Kashmir is not conducive for holding assembly elections and a low voter turnout will not serve any purpose. "The situation is not conducive for polls. There is a deep polarization of voters in Jammu and the feeling of alienation is very strong in the valley," NC president Omar Abdullah said. "We are not in favour of depriving people from their democratic rights. We are in favour of empowerment of people. Elections are not the solution to Kashmir issue. Elections will solve only day-to-day problems," he said.

Social front

Rajasthan heritage hotels a big draw with foreign tourists

Thanks to some thoughtful initiatives by former princely families in Rajasthan almost two decades ago, the palaces, forts, castles and *havelis* once on the verge of collapse and disintegration are pulsating with life now in the form of heritage hotels. In fact, the heritage hotels have become almost a movement in the country’s tourism sector and their tribe is flourishing.

Taking a leap of faith

Dalits are increasingly seeking social salvation through a more egalitarian faith. In disparate parts of rural India, they are embracing Buddhism in droves. Many merely drop the surnames that mark them out forever as low-caste Hindus; others take on new ones, such as Gautam, Maurya, Shakya and even Ambedkar. In another India upper class and upwardly mobile Buddhism is not a religion but a way of life. Lawyer Mandeep Singh says he found refuge in the Karma Kagyu school of Himalayan Buddhism because he liked the idea of being responsible for his own actions. There are many variations of Hindu-Buddhism. There are the 'HiBu', described by Mahabodhi Society patron B K Modi as "Hindu-Buddhists, or Indians who are born into Hinduism but make a choice to live life the Buddhist way". 75 lakh Dalits have abandoned Hinduism and converted to Buddhism since 1956, says Udit Raj, chairman of the All India Confederation of SC/ST Organizations. Modi says Buddhism is especially attractive because "there is no caste, there is no God or symbols of God either. The practice teaches you there are no angels or devils on the outside it is just the good or bad within you.'' But the Mahabodhi Society doesn't encourage conversion, just the melding of faiths. Modi argues, ''Why should you denounce one faith when you can easily embrace two?'' For many, however, Buddhism is almost a fad. Blissfully unaware of all that goes into becoming a true follower of the Enlightened One, a young internet-user updates his online status on a popular networking website. "Zen forever," it says.

India bans smoking in public, tobacco firms fume

India banned smoking in public places on Thursday in an attempt to fight tobacco use blamed, directly or indirectly, for a fifth of all deaths in the world's third-largest consumer. The ban, which includes all offices and restaurants, will hit its estimated 240 million tobacco users, who are likely to find their homes and cars among the last few places to light up. The government cites the economic costs and the need to stem the loss of human lives but tobacco firms say the ban infringes on individual rights. The ban includes schools and colleges, pubs and discotheques, hospitals and bus stops. Offenders will be fined 200 rupees ($4).

The risks of religious devotion in India

A collapsed wall, rumours of a bomb, coconut milk spilled by devotees; the checklist grew Wednesday of possible catalysts for a stampede at a Hindu temple in India that left 149 dead. But others pointed to a more fundamental problem: a simple lack of organisation that attaches a largely avoidable level of risk to the mass religious pilgrimages undertaken by hundreds of thousands of ordinary Indians every year. Tuesday's disaster at the 15th-century Chamunda Devi temple in Jodhpur in the tourist state of Rajasthan took the death toll from stampedes in 2008 alone beyond the 360 mark. "While we are alive to the menace of terror, it's strange that we are quite content to let avoidable disasters like stampedes kill more people than blasts do," said the Times of India. "The 'enemy' here is not difficult to identify -- it's the grossly inadequate attention

given to crowd management," the newspaper added. In most cases, crowd management measures are rudimentary, or even non-existent, and police action has often been blamed for exacerbating panic when things go wrong. The Jodhpur incident was the fourth in India this year and came less than two months after around 150 Hindu worshippers died in a stampede in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh. In the meantime, politicians lost little time in seeking to extract what capital they could from the incident, with the Congress-led government in New Delhi accusing the main opposition BJP party, which controls the Rajasthan state legislature, of negligence. "This loss of lives is inexcusable," said Congress spokesman Abhishek Singhvi. Senior BJP leader and former foreign minister Jaswant Singh offered the observation that "No one has done this deliberately, but someone is responsible."

Alternative Nobel for Indians working for social justice

India's Krishnammal and Sankaralingam Jagannathan and their organisation Land for the Tillers' Freedom (LAFTI) have been awarded the Alternate Nobel Prize 2008 for social justice and sustainable human development, an official said here. They have been given the award "for two long lifetimes of work dedicated to realising in practice the Gandhian vision of social justice and sustainable human development, for which they have been referred to as 'India's soul'," said mR Ole von Uexkull, executive director of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation. "Krishnammal and Sankaralingam Jagannathan, and their organisation LAFTI (Land for the Tillers' Freedom), are awarded the 2008 Right Livelihood Award." The non-profit organisation works in Nagapattinam, Thiruvarur and East Thanjavur districts of Tamil Nadu. The Right Livelihood Award was established in 1980 to honour and support those "offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today" based on the Gandhian dictum: "There is enough in this world for every need but not for all the greed. "It has become widely known as the Alternative Nobel Prize and there are now 128 laureates from 56 countries.

Foreign Relations

India unsure of Zardari's ability to fight terror

New Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari is keen in trying to improve Indo-Pak relations and it came through clearly during his talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh but it remains to be seen whether he will be able to implement anti-terror measures, official sources said today. The sources said the joint statement after Zardari-Singh talks was a great step where Zardari was willing to say something in public to take on terrorism. The President is committed but it remains to be seen whether he will implement the anti-terror measures, the sources said. Pakistan's resolve to jointly fight terrorism along with India was music to India's ears, the sources said.

The sources said both Bush and Singh were not sure if Zardari will be able to deliver on his promises.

PM faces EU ire over 'massacre' of Christians

The European Union on Monday ticked off Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for his government's failure to prevent what it called a "massacre" of Christians in Orissa and Karnataka. This strongly-worded description of the violence in Kandhamal and the Bajrang Dal's destruction of churches in Karnataka came during the India-EU summit here.The issue was taken up strongly with Singh by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who is also the head of the European Council, and Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission. Talking to reporters, Sarkozy strongly dismissed the suggestion that the "massacre" could be equated with the discrimination Sikhs allegedly face in France. Although Sarkozy said he admired Singh's condemnation of the anti-Christian violence as a "national shame" and his promise to guarantee the religious rights of minority communities in India, the two sides clearly differed on the scale of the violence against Christians in India.

India won't support Iran's nuke ambitions: PM

On the verge of wrapping up paradigm-altering civil nuclear energy agreements with US and France, India has stepped up opposition to Iran’s nuclear weapons programme, in a coincidence which is loaded with implications for the country's diplomacy as well as domestic politics. "We don't support the nuclear weapons aspirations of Iran," PM Manmohan Singh said, stepping beyond the position government had so far followed on the issue. This is a more hard-line position on Iran's nuclear ambitions than has been exhibited thus far by the Indian government. It is in line with expectation that US would expect greater convergence on Iran after the nuclear deal.

US overturns ban on nuclear trade with India

The United States yesterday overturned a three-decade ban on the trade of atomic fuel and technology with India, providing President Bush with what may prove his most significant foreign policy victory while in office. Analysts say the landmark move underscores Washington's ambitions to champion India as an Asian counterweight to China. India has argued that access to nuclear power is essential to fuel its economic rise. President Bush said the legislation "will strengthen our global nuclear non-proliferation efforts, protect the environment, create jobs and assist India in meeting its growing energy needs in a responsible manner." However, critics have condemned Mr Bush's unprecedented willingness to supply India with civilian nuclear

technology despite the country's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Amnesty urges India to protect minority Christians

Amnesty International has urged India to act on its words and end what it said were ongoing attacks by hard-line Hindu nationalists against the country's minority Christian community. In a statement late Wednesday, Amnesty also urged New Delhi to "conduct a prompt and impartial investigation into the attacks... publish the results and bring those responsible to justice."

India's reputation wounded by religious killings

Anti-Christian violence, which began in a remote district of India's tribal belt in the eastern state of Orissa in, late August, has become an international embarrassment for India's secular Congress-led government. It has spread to four more states, including Karnataka, the home of the subcontinent's information technology hub in Bangalore. On the sidelines of the signing of an Indo-French nuclear deal this week, Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president and current European Union president, said he had conveyed to Manmohan Singh, India's prime minister, the EU's "serious concerns" over "massacres of Christians". Many observers believe that Hindu nationalists have turned an old conflict over identity, rights and entitlement between two communities into a religious one in an attempt to win votes for the BJP in the forthcoming national elections. The proxy war over faith is fought between the original inhabitants, the predominantly Hindu tribals of the Kandha ethnic group and the former Hindu Dalits - formerly known as untouchables - of the Pana ethnic group, who have converted in large numbers to Christianity to escape India's caste system.

Nepal-India water talks conclude with new pacts

The three-day meeting of high-level secretaries of Nepal and India on water concluded on Wednesday with new agreements. Shankar Prasad Koirala, secretary at the Ministry of Water Resources, who headed the Nepali delegation, said a Pancheswor Development Authority would be formed soon to carry on with the implementation of the Pancheswor Multipurpose Project. The 5600-MW project is a joint project between the two countries. The pre-feasibility study for the 245-MW Naumure project which the Government of India agreed to provide Nepal as a ‘goodwill gesture’ is said to be completed in the next three months. Talking to reporters, India’s Water Resource Secretary Umesh Narayan Panjiar said inundation issues will be solved jointly. Meanwhile, Koirala said India has agreed to build an “unregulated water outlet” in the flood-prone Laxmanpur area for the rivers Gandhaili and Sotiyanala. As per its past agreement, India would also be building a four -lane12-km Mahendranagar-Tanakpur Road, he informed.

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GULG COOPERATION COUNCIL

OCT 4TH – OCT 10TH

MADIHA KAUKAB

Presentation: October 15, 2008

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NEWS MONITORING REPORT

GCC

Terrorism

Australia warns over terror attacks in Gulf

Australia has warned Kuwait and the rest of the countries in the Arabian peninsula of possible terrorist attacks on Western interests during October, reports Al-Seyassah daily.

The Australian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commerce posted on its website on Sept 26, 2008 a notice which said, “We have information that a group of terrorists are planning to carry out attacks in Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirate, Yemen and Jordan, particularly in Kuwait to harm Western interests.” The notice added “these attacks may also happen at any time and at any place in Australia.”

Economic Front

Doha to host workshop on job creation

Despite the massive cash flows earned in oil exports by GCC countries, unemployment rate among its youth has reached up to 15 percent in some member countries.

To address the serious unemployment problem, Qatar is hosting a workshop tilled ''exchanging experiences in resolving unemployment" in the period October 21-23.

The event is organised by the Urban Planning and Development Authority's general secretariat and the Permanent Population Committee in collaboration with the GCC General Secretariat and

will be attended by decision markers in the GCC member states, experts, the Kuwaiti Arab Planning Institute and Bahrain Centre for Studies and Researches.

GCC countries are requested to secure 300,000 high-quality private sector jobs annually at twice the current salaries, according to an estimate by global management group, McKinsey & Company.

Saudi Arabia

Social Front

- **Saudi seize drugs, arms in shootout with smugglers**

Saudi border guards have seized more than 1.2 tonnes of hashish as well as weapons along the border with Yemen during a shootout with drug traffickers, a senior official said on Saturday.

- **Saudi Shoura draft law for combating harassment**

The Shoura Council is to discuss the draft law for "Combating Harassment at Workplaces in the Private Sector" with Ministry of Labor officials. The draft law has been prepared after Shoura members and a volunteer legal office studied harassment regulations in the US, Europe and other Islamic countries to define deterrence laws suitable for the Kingdom, Al-Madina Arabia daily said. The Council will also set up a committee with government bodies to study harassment in the field, visiting hospitals and companies with female sections, such as advertising and publicity companies.

- **Prince Sultan donates SR22m to build housing units for armed forces**

Crown Prince Sultan, deputy premier and minister of defense and aviation, yesterday donated SR22 million to build 649 housing units for members of the armed forces in the Northwestern Region, it was announced yesterday.

Earlier, addressing an Eid ceremony organized by the armed forces at King Abdulaziz Military City, the crown prince commended the successful completion of Saif Al-Salam military exercises. “I am now convinced that the joint military operations are going on well as planned and the performance of the four sectors of armed forces was excellent,” the crown prince told the gathering, which included top commanders.

- **38,000 'street' children in Saudi Arabaia, says study**

There are nearly 38,000 children on the Kingdom’s streets, according to a recent study published in the Security Research Journal. Some 68 percent of these children are foreign vendors and beggars. Most of these were found to have entered the Kingdom on Umrah or Haj visa but never left Makkah. The study found that the families of these children could not afford their education, compelling them to drop out of school and have a second home in the street.

International Front

- **Saudi Arabia sounds alarm at Israel's nuclear activities outside IAEA**

Saudi Arabia urged on Friday for forcing Israel into joining the nuclear safeguard system of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). "The safeguards must be imposed on all world nuclear powers without exception," Saudi chief delegate to the UN agency Prince Turki Bin Saud said in his address to the ongoing 52nd General Conference of the U.N. nuclear watchdog here. The system should not stand in the way of the world countries to achieve economic development, he warned. Prince Turki voiced hope that that current conference which kicked off on Monday, would be move helpful than the previous one in prevailing the safeguards system over the Middle East and alleviate the concerns of the countries of region over Israel's nuclear program.

The non-nuclear countries have justified concerns over the nuclear arsenals of other countries and could be forced to seek military nuclear program, thus undermining the NPT system, he warned. The use of double standards in the NPT application undermines the credibility of the treaty, Prince Turki added.

- **Syria blocks distribution of Saudi-owned daily**

Syria is blocking distribution of the Saudi-owned pan-Arab daily Al-Hayat, the paper's Beirut bureau chief Zuhair Qusaybati told AFP on Thursday. "The censorship authorities at the information ministry in Damascus asked Al-Hayat's bureau in the Syrian capital on Monday to stop sending its issues to the country until further notice," Qusaybati told AFP.

He said that no explanation had been given for the decision. The ban on Al-Hayat's distribution in Syria came hot on the heels of a bomb blast which killed 17 people in Damascus on Saturday, the deadliest attack in the Syrian capital in more than a decade.

The Syrian official media have since repeatedly complained that the Saudi authorities did not condemn the bombing more vocally.

- **Meshaal calls for thaw in Saudi-Syria ties**

Exiled Hamas supremo Khaled Meshaal has called for a thaw in ties between Saudi Arabia and Syria during a recent visit to Saudi Arabia, an Arab diplomat said yesterday.

"During meetings with Saudi officials, Meshaal raised the issue of Saudi-Syrian relations, which have long been tense, and stressed the importance of improving those ties," the diplomat said, requesting anonymity. Relations between Riyadh and Damascus have been tense since the February 2005 assassination of Lebanese former premier Rafiq Hariri, a close Saudi ally, in a bombing widely blamed on Syria.

- **Kabul held Mecca talks with Taliban: Saudi paper**

The Afghan government held talks with the Taliban in Saudi Arabia last month, a leading Saudi paper reported, despite denials from both Kabul and the Taliban that such talks had taken place. The Saudi-owned pan-Arab daily Asharq Al-Awsat, quoting informed Afghan sources, said on Tuesday the three-day talks were held under Saudi auspices in the Muslim holy city of Mecca.

It said the talks, aimed at "stopping the violence" in Afghanistan, were held during the final days of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which ended on September 29. The negotiators moved on to Islamabad on Sunday, the paper said.

They included Mullah Mohammad Tayeb Agha, who was the chief in Kandahar of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and his spokesman before the Taliban's ouster from power by the US-led invasion of 2001, and Omar's "foreign minister", Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkel.

It transpired during the talks that the Taliban leader is "no longer an ally of Al-Qaeda," Asharq Al-Awsat quoted a source close to the talks as saying.

The report came one day after the US-backed Afghan government said it was hoping for peace talks with the Taliban but denied a US news report that a first round of negotiations took place in Mecca between September 24 and 27.

The government did, however, want such talks in order to find a way to end a Taliban-led insurgency, spokesman Homayun Hamidzada told AFP, reiterating a statement made by Karzai last week. "It has not happened yet. We would like that to happen but how, when and where, by what mechanism and with whose help -- we are working on that," Hamidzada said. A spokesman for the Taliban, Zabihullah Mujahed, said the movement had "not had any talks or negotiations with the government, neither in Saudi nor anywhere else."Karzai told reporters last week that Afghan envoys had made repeated trips to Saudi Arabia and to Pakistan to facilitate negotiations but nothing had been finalised.

- **UN Assembly to discuss Abdullah's interfaith initiative**

The United Nations General Assembly will hold a session in the middle of next month to discuss King Abdullah's initiative to promote interfaith dialogue. This was announced by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon while attending a ceremony marking Saudi Arabia's National Day at the UN headquarters in New York. "I have tremendous respect for King Abdullah and appreciate his leadership role in many initiatives," the UN chief said, referring to the International Interfaith Conference organized by the Saudi leader in Madrid last July. "I personally believe that the dialogue between followers of various faiths would contribute to solving many international conflicts," he added.

Terrorism

The Saudi Interior Ministry has identified the two suspected Al Qaeda terrorists who were killed in gun battles with security forces four years ago.

Qatar

International Front

- **French FM holds extensive talks on Arab issues with Qatari PM**

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner held extensive talks on a number of problems throughout the Arab world Thursday night with Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Al-Thani, French foreign ministry spokesman Eric Chevalier revealed here Friday. The lengthy phone conversation addressed notably the situation in Sudan and the crisis affecting the Darfur region.
Qatar, which currently chairs the Gulf Cooperation Council, has recently launched an initiative, supported by France, to try to resolve the five-year-old Darfur problem and end the fighting which has killed over 200, 000 civilians and left more than two million others homeless. The Qatari Prime Minister updated Kouchner on his efforts in this area and Kouchner "praised the mediation efforts" of Qatar.

- **Qatar's Deputy Premier voices support for Lebanon**

Qatar's Deputy Premier and Minister of Energy and Industry H E Abdullah bin Hamad Al Attiyah has reiterated Qatar's support to Lebanon on all fronts. Al Attiyah noted Qatar's role in reconstructing the Lebanese towns and villages destroyed by the Israeli forces during the war in July 2006, in addition to rebuilding and repairing all places of worship including mosques, churches and religious centres in southern Lebanon.

He hailed the Lebanese national reconciliation as part of the Doha Agreement saying that it would lead to stabilisation of the political situation ahead of the coming elections. He also praised the Islamic reconciliation among the Lebanese factions and parties as well as the ongoing reconciliation efforts among the Maronite Christian factions expecting that such reconciliations would have a positive impact on Lebanon's future.

- **Qatari initiative likely to solve Darfur crisis - UN mediator**

The joint mediator of the United Nations and the African Union in Darfur conflict Djibril Bassole said on Wednesday the Qatari initiative could lead to final settlement in the western Sudanese region.

Oman

Social Front

- **Oman scientists begin second phase of project to grow plants without soil**

Scientists in Oman have entered the second phase of a pioneering research project to grow plants without soil. The first stage of the Hydroponic Farming Research programme, comprising laboratory experiments, was launched in September and has just been completed in the Crop Sciences Department at the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

International Front

- **Oman, Austria hold talks to boost ties**

Political consultations between the Sultanate and Austria were held at the Foreign Ministry in Vienna on Thursday The two sides discussed aspects of bilateral co-operation and ways of boosting them in various fields, including investment promotion and development of exports as well as co-operation in environment, tourism and cultural activities. They also exchanged viewpoints on current regional and international issues of common concern and stressed support of dialogue between civilisations in addition to strengthening co-operation and understanding in pursuit of regional and international security and stability.

- **Oman plans fund drive for Bihar flood victims**

Members of the Indian community in Oman are joining hands to collect funds for flood victims in Bihar and other parts of the country.

The Indian Social Club (ISC), which is spearheading the drive together with India's Embassy in Muscat, is hopeful of raising more than RO300,000 during the three-month period granted by the Sultanate's authorities to run the campaign. The floods caused unprecedented destruction, leaving scores of people dead and more than two million people homeless in Bihar alone.

Kuwait

Social Front

- **Law on human trafficking ready in Kuwait**

The Minister of Justice, Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Hussein Al Huraiti announced that the law on human trafficking is complete and ready to be submitted to the Cabinet.

- **Laborers' issues in Kuwait too complicated**

A government official said that the laborers' issues of human trafficking are complicated and they cannot be tackled within a short period of time. He slammed all those companies of getting them into the country on visit visas and making money in return. He said these companies then force them to look for jobs. Thousands of laborers entered Kuwait on visit visas and have not left the country despite the fact that their visit visas have expired.

- **'Kuwait's five-year draft development plan addresses all key issues'**

The Secretary General of the Higher Council for Planning and Development Dr. Adel Al-Wugayyan said on Monday that the five-year draft development plan for the State of Kuwait addressed all current key issues including employment and population.

Political Front

- **Kuwait education minister may resign if grilled in parliament**

MPs have started lobbying ahead of preparations for the opening of the new legislative term scheduled for October 21. Some MPs were seen coordinating to convene a meeting to elect parliamentary committees while others suggested new laws to amend Article 2 of the constitution and make all laws in accordance to the Islamic religion.

Some officials speculated that Education Minister Nouriya Al-Sabeeh might not be grilled, but if that happens, she will resign and will be replaced by current Health Minister, Ali Al-Barrak, who in turn will also be replaced by someone else. All manmade laws will be changed into Islamic ones to put an end to crimes like assaults, thefts, alcohol and drugs abuse as well as adultery, he said. He said, implementing laws according to the Islamic religion will be on top of the council's priorities in addition to economic laws compatible with the Islamic religion to put an end to usury laws.

International Front

- **Kuwait amazed at Bahraini proposal**

A senior Kuwaiti Ministry Of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) official has expressed astonishment at Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa's call to for establish a regional organization includes the Arab states, Iran, Turkey and Israel.

The official, who wished to remain anonymous, questioned how Kuwait could join an organization of which Israel is a member without having naturalized relations with Israel. He also said that the MOFA has not received any information regarding the Bahraini proposal.

- **Austria hails relations with Kuwait**

Austria is keen on bolstering relations with all Muslim states, including Kuwait, said President Heinz Fischer yesterday. Speaking on the sideline of a reception ceremony for leaders of the Arab and Muslim communities held in Hofburg Imperial Palace, Fischer congratulated Muslims on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr. He revealed that relations with Kuwait have been very strong; pointing out that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has invited him to visit Kuwait by 2009. Fischer affirmed that he would be visiting several Arab states next month, adding that the fifth reception for representatives of Arab and Muslim communities was to solidify dialogue between Austria and followers of Islam.

- **Kuwait, Poland discuss bilateral ties**

Acting Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at al-Seif Palace on Sunday Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klette and the delegation accompanying him. Issues of mutual concern and means to develop bilateral relations at all levels, in addition to latest regional and international developments, were discussed during the reception.

- **Kuwait FM meets US deputy secretary of state**

Kuwait Deputy prime minister and foreign minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received here Tuesday US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte. Both sides discussed issues of mutual concern and ways of further boost bilateral relations.

- **Kuwait due to activate agreement with Philippines: official**

Kuwait's Minister of Health Ali Al-Barrak's visit to the Filipino capital, Manila, due next week, is aimed at activating and vitalizing mutual health cooperation and related sectors, Kuwaiti ambassador to the Philippines Bader Nasser Al-Houti said on Wednesday.

- **Kuwait-Bahrain ties see qualitative boost - Sheikh Azzam**

The Kuwaiti-Bahraini ties see qualitative boost thanks to the care of the wise leaders of both countries, Kuwait Ambassador to Bahrain Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah said on Wednesday. "The bilateral ties are developing steadily and show a great promise for cooperation in the future," Sheikh Azzam told KUNA after meeting Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa here.

- **Kuwait urged to ratify ICC treaty**

The Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC) - an international network of more than 2,500 non-governmental and civil society organizations - has called on Kuwait to demonstrate its commitment to international justice and the rule of law by ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Overseas Employees' Issues

- **'20,000 illegals have left Kuwait'**

"Nearly 20,000 illegal residents utilized the Amiri amnesty and left the country without paying fines," say sources at the General Department of Immigration, adding officials expect at least 40,000 expatriates to avail the offer by Oct 15, the last day of amnesty, reports Al-Anba daily.

- **20,000 seek amnesty in Kuwait**

Nearly 20,000 illegal residents utilized the Amiri amnesty and left the country without paying fines," say sources at the General Department of Immigration, adding officials expect at least 40,000 expatriates to avail the offer by October 15, the last day of amnesty, reports Al-Anba daily. The department of immigration is accepting cases around the clock," he said indicating that scores of people have already paid necessary penalties and amended their status so far. "People who have lost or outdated passports can also visit their closest Public Immigration office to arrange a single-travel permit in cooperation with their embassy," he added. Meanwhile, the General Department of Immigration Investigation has adopted a structural hierarchy "which will enable the department to reduce the number of illegal expatriates in the country," say sources. The department now has four section – Investigation, Search, Cooperation and Follow-up. Five sections like Visits, Visas, Arab Residence, Foreign Residence and Government Residence have been dissolved and the employees transferred to other sections.

- **Kuwait govt mulls squeeze on visas**

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MSAL) in Kuwait is reportedly considering banning the transfer of Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian workers' visit visas into work permits, according to reports in the Kuwait Times.

Bahrain

Social Front

- **Bahrain employment rate rises 4.1%**

Bahraini employment rate rose by 4.1 per cent in the second quarter of the year while non-Bahraini employment growth rate in the Kingdom slowed down to 10.5 per cent causing the Bahraini-expatriate employment gap to shrink to 6.4 per cent.Total employment grew by 8.8 per cent during the period compared to the first quarter of the year, which recorded 8.1 per cent growth rate. This, however, was slower than the record 13.3 per cent growth rate achieved in Q3 2007.

- **New marriage rule in Bahrain to protect couples' rights**

A Bahraini lawyer has drafted a new marriage contract which covers various aspects like rights and conditions of couples, such as alimony, women's right to divorce in case of husbands absconding or reported missing and more importantly, women's rights over child custody in the case of a divorce.

- **Outstanding teachers will be felicitated: Bahraini minister**

The Minister of Education Dr Majid bin Ali Al Nuaimi lauded the teacher's efforts in educating students and implementing educational development programmes. "Outstanding and creative teachers' would be honoured", he added. The ministry organises a ceremony on this occasion reflecting the continued support for education.

- **Education to counter violence: Bahrain Human Rights Society**

"Educating the youth through special curriculums in schools, will help in reasoning out the disturbances in the country, and embracing Gandhian thoughts could reduce tension on the streets," Abdulla Al Derazi, Secretary General of the Bahrain Human Rights Society told Bahrain Tribune.

- **Bahraini Cabinet condemns attack in Damestan**

The Cabinet yesterday condemned the criminal act that targeted the lives of three citizens in the village of Damestan recently.

- **'New programme to help Bahrainis'**

Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa said upgrading of police stations has helped curb crime at the launch of the Performance Indices Assessment Programme. The Interior Minister said the programme created new concepts of government performance that

would directly benefit the Bahraini community under the directives of His Majesty, the King and the comprehensive economic vision launched by the Crown Prince and economic development board chairman.

- **Jobs on way for 1,000 graduates in Bahrain**

More than 1,000 unemployed Bahraini university graduates will be trained and recruited following the signing of a BD790,000 agreement yesterday. That is how much the government is paying Ernst & Young to train and find jobs for 1,088 graduates over the next nine months.

Political Front

- **Councils' cooperation a must: Bahraini Shura chairman**

Shura Council Chairman Ali Saleh Al Saleh underlined the importance of cooperation between the Shura and the Representatives' Council. He said that sustaining this cooperation would ensure accomplishing more achievements that serve citizens and the country. The Shura Council will exert maximum effort as it always has to pass legislations that should ensure more national gains, he said.

- **Bahraini King and PM discussed reshuffle**

His Majesty the King, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, and the Prime Minister, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, held a meeting at the Sakhir Palace yesterday which dealt with a forthcoming limited cabinet reshuffle, the overall situation in the country as well as economic plans and development projects under implementation to improve citizens' welfare.

International Front

- **Remove disparities: Bahraini PM**

The Prime Minister, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, has called for concerted efforts from the international community to remove the significant gap in levels of urbanisation in various parts of the world and to minimise the existing disparities in living standards and employment opportunities.

- **GCC should take unified stance to tackle turmoil: PM**

Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa called for maintaining national principles and political, economic and urban gains amidst rapid regional and international changes that require alertness. The Premier said he was confident that Bahrain, with the leadership of His Majesty the King and its people, was capable of dealing with challenges imposed by global circumstances and turmoil, especially economic ones.

The Premier also commended the role of religious scholars in guidance and social aspects. Furthermore, he said that the current global economic status has become a source of concern for the whole world which by being more interconnected has its financial institutions more susceptible to being affected by fluctuations. Since they are deemed as an important economic

force in the world and therefore if they got effected by economic crisis then that would certainly make it worse, the Premier said, adding that he was confident that the GCC would be able to effectively cooperate and protect their economies.

- **Bahrain Crown Prince visit to boost Japan ties**

Bahrain's ties with Japan will enter a new phase as Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and Economic Development Board chairman Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa is set to pay a historical visit to Japan today. Recently, the two countries decided to launch joint projects in Hidd including energy and water projects and a hotel at Amwaj Islands.

- **Bahraini Crown Prince on key Japan visit to boost ties**

Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa yesterday held talks with Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso in the Cabinet headquarters, Tokyo. Both sides reviewed bilateral co-operation and ways of boosting it in various vital sectors, including commercial, economic, investment, cultural, industrial, technology and educational fields.

- **Bahrain group questions US Congress move**

A human rights group has criticised the US Congress' move to evaluate religious freedom in Bahrain.Regional and International Director of the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society(BHRWS), Faisal Fulad told Khaleej Times on Thursday that with its open policies Bahrain doesn't fear evaluation of religious freedom enjoyed by its people, but the selection of three activists from unofficial organisations to represent the country at a forum in the US has raised doubts about the evaluation purposes.

UAE

Social Front

- **Dubai Cares' support to girls' education hailed by US charity**

Dubai Cares has been lauded by Care USA, a US-based humanitarian organisation, for supporting the charity's efforts for education of girls. "Dubai Cares recognised the importance of educating girls, awarding Care a $ 19 million grant towards our primary education work in Yemen, with a special emphasis on girls. Partners like Dubai Cares understand the importance of investing in long-term programmes in order to make lasting impact," said Care USA's CEO and President Dr Helene Gayle while speaking about Care USA's strategic plans and importance of focusing on girls' education.

- **UAE's first woman judge sworn-in**

Khulood Ahmed Jawan Al Dhaheri, the first national woman to become a judge in the UAE took the oath today before H.H. sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Presidential Affairs and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Judiciary Department. Sheikh Mansour said the appointment of

the first female judge in the UAE came as part of the comprehensive reforms currently taking place at the Judiciary Department and in continuation of the policy aimed at increasing women's participation in the comprehensive development drive witnessed in the emirate.

Economic Front

- **Dubai Moves to Join a 'Spa-cial' List of International Centres**

With an unprecedented growth of the spa industry, Dubai joins an already established network of international anti-ageing events.The event is being organised by Tarsus and The American Academy of Anti-Ageing Medicine (A4M).The global spa economy is estimated to be worth over $ 250 billion, according to a recent report unveiled at the 2008 Global Spa Summit in New York.

International Front

- **UAE to dispatch urgent relief to Algerian flood-victims**

The UAE will rush urgent relief to flood-hit population in Algeria. Living conditions of people have been deteriorating due to flash floods which swept the southern Algerian oasis province of Ghardaia, killing 55 people, injuring hundereds of people and washing away more than 4000 houses and rendering their dwellers homeless.

- **Abu Dhabi CP to visit Iraq Tuesday**

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces of the UAE, Air Marshal Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al-Nuhayyan, is heading an official delegation due to visit Baghdad on Tuesday. An official statement, released on Tuesday, said the visit aimed at holding talks with senior Iraqi officials on boosting bilateral relations and mutual cooperation between both countries.

- **Abu Dhabi crown prince makes surprise Baghdad visit**

Abu Dhabi crown prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan paid an unannounced visit to Iraq on Tuesday that he said was aimed at "confirming our total support" for the war-ravaged nation. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who welcomed the crown prince at Baghdad international airport, said he was appreciative of the support from the United Arab Emirates, of which Abu Dhabi is the capital.
The crown prince's visit came hot on the heels of a visit by Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit on Sunday. Washington has been pushing its Sunni Arab allies to send ambassadors to Baghdad as a counterweight to Shiite Iran. The UAE withdrew its most senior diplomat -- a charge d'affaires -- from Baghdad in May 2006 after another diplomat was kidnapped by Islamist militants and held for two weeks.

- **UAE calls for cooperation in strategic weapons disarmament**

The United Arab Emirates Tuesday evening called for serious efforts by the international community towards strategic weapons disarmament by showing great respect for international law and UN Charter. The UAE also reiterated the need to ensure peaceful use of nuclear energy

and cited its peaceful nuclear programme as a good example in transparency in the provision of nuclear-driven energy requirements without the need for uranium enrichment and which, if needed, must be done under the close supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Yemen

Social Front

- **Yemen will host next Monday a regional symposium on the political role of tribe and clan.**

The symposium would be organized by the Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights YOHR in collaboration with the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Jordanian Strategic Studies CSS and the Iraq-based Gulf Research Center GRC.

International Front

- **Yemen, US hold talks**

Minister of Foreign Affairs Abu Bakr al-Qirbi met here on Sunday with the U.S. ambassador Stephen Seche. The meeting exchanged views on several regional issues, topped by the Palestinian issue. The two officials also discussed the aspects of cooperation between Yemen and United States.

- **Yemen says 'Israel-linked' terror cell dismantled**

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh announced on Monday the dismantling of a "terrorist cell" which he said was linked to Israeli intelligence services.

Saleh gave no details but sources close to the investigation said he was apparently referring to a six-member cell arrested on suspicion of involvement in a deadly attack against the US embassy in the Yemeni capital last month.

"A terrorist cell was arrested five days ago and will be referred to the judicial authorities for its links with the Israeli intelligence services," Saleh was quoted as saying by the official Saba news agency.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

South Asia

Ghashia Kayani

Weekly Report: from 4 October to 10 October2008

Presentation: 15 October 2008

BANGLADESH:

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- AL and BNP likely to go for movement
- Khaleda charge-sheeted in Barapukuria graft case
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- Myanmar delegation visit will strengthen ties
- Long link-road likely to be constructed between BD and Myanmar

Govt mulls reducing fuel price soon

The government is going to reduce the fuel price within a month following the sharp fall in oil price in the international market. "As the oil price is falling drastically in the international market, considering people's sufferings we will also adjust the oil price in our country. An oil tariff formula has been finalised by the concerned ministry. The tariff formula will review prices every month and the adjustment will come into effect after three months," Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser M Tamim told reporters after an exclusive meeting with the Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam at Planning at Commission office at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. The move comes as oil price experienced a sharp fall in the global market. The oil is now being sold below US$87 per barrel down from its record high of $147 on July 11 this year. Earlier, government increased diesel and petroleum prices by 34 to 38 per cent in the local market from July 01 after global prices nearly doubled over the previous twelve months. He said as oil is being sold in the international market below US $ 87 per barrel, the government has decided to cut the price at home within a month. "Following the adjustment the prices of diesel and kerosene will come down. And if the prices of octane and petrol fall in the international market, government will also consider to adjust their prices," M Tamim said.

Myanmar delegation visit will strengthen ties

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury received the visiting Myanmar Foreign Minister U Nyan Win in his office on Wednesday morning, said a Foreign Ministry release. Their discussions reportedly covered a wide range of topics: tri-national road connectivity linking China, Myanmar and Bangladesh; possible purchase of 50,000 to 100,000 tons of rice from Myanmar by Bangladesh on an annual basis, import of pharmaceuticals from Bangladesh to Myanmar, the possibility of setting up a mechanism comprising Bangladesh, Myanmar and UNHCR to expedite the repatriation of the remaining Rohingya refugees, and the scheduling of the next expert-level meeting on maritime boundaries in Dhaka in November. Speaking to the media after the visit, Iftekhar Chowdhury said, "We spoke of ways and means to implement the common projects that were discussed in the bilateral meeting yesterday. Building our friendship is obviously to mutual interest and we will expand both political and economic relations which will be to the advantage of both. Strengthening relations with all our neighbours is a pillar of our ten-point foreign policy and links with Myanmar came within that purview". He added that: "Myanmar also appreciates Bangladesh's policy looking to link ourselves to the east with Myanmar acting as a gateway". Foreign Minister U Nyan Win was at his side during the press briefing.

Consensus to disband fronts AL collects form for registration, urges to lift emergency

After strong debate on some contentious issues, including disbanding party's front organisations and barring partisan election observers, both Awami League and Election Commission reached a consensus during their fourth-time bilateral dialogue at Election Secretariat in the capital. Saying that the AL Working Committee meeting would finally take decision in this regard next Saturday, AL leaders in principle accepted the proposal of EC that the party would set all front organisations free and there would be only independent associate bodies, but it would not be mentioned in the Party Constitution. Apart from the disbanding front organizations, some other issues - including lifting of the State of Emergency, new electoral laws, amendments to the Representation of the People Order (mainly clause 91 (E) which allows to declare a candidate ineligible for contesting polls after completing final selection of nomination) and not to allow some native election observation teams for their alleged partisan role in the past elections.

Massive crackdown on black money holders, tax dodgers

National Board of Revenue (NBR) will launch massive crackdown on black money holders from November 1, if they (black money holders) do not disclose their undisclosed money by October 31. "It is a matter of social responsibility. The black money holders will have to face legal action if they fail to disclose their undisclosed money before the NBR by the end of this current month.

Not only the black money holders but also the persons involved in various business, will have to pay tax in due time. Otherwise they will have to face the same fate like black money holders. Law enforcers will help us in launching crackdown on black money holders," NBR Chairman Abdul Mazid told The Bangladesh Today.

AL and BNP likely to go for movement

Major political parties Awami League and BNP may go for movement to press home their demands including withdrawal of cases against Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia and other politicians to ensure their unhindered participation in the coming parliamentary elections. In recent development-the government's opposition to the bail of Sheikh Hasina in Noor Ali's case and ACC's preparation to submit charge-sheets against Khaleda Zia in Barapukuria coalmine and Zia Orphanage Trust cases has sparked discontent and uncertainty among Awami League and BNP pushing those towards movement. Possibility of movement has been expressed by Awami League Acting President Zillur Rahman who said on September 29 that the party will have to go for movement if party's president Sheikh Hasina is deprived of bails or legal obstacles are not removed. He also added "The party is ready for movement." AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sen Gupta said Hasina's bail rejection is ominous and if she is not allowed to return home freely, the party men will be forced to take to the streets. On the other hand, the ACC's recent preparation to submit charge-sheets against Khaleda Zia and her son in coalmine deal and Zia Orphanage Trust fund embezzlement graft cases has created uncertainty in BNP and its alliance and provoked its supporters. In reaction to ACC's move, BNP leaders have already hinted about possible movement.

BTRC to introduce IMEI system by December

The international mobile equipment identification (IMEI) system will be introduced in the country by December next in the wake of the raising trend of stealing and hijacking cell phone sets. If the system is introduced, he said, mobile phone thieves and snatchers will not be able to use the theft or snatched cell phone sets. "The system has become very effective in different European countries," he added. The BTRC chairman said 20 British companies have shown interest in setting up call centers in the country. Of them, six companies have already signed agreements in this regard. To reduce infrastructure development cost, Maj Gen Alam said the BTRC has formulated guidelines for infrastructure sharing for mobile phone operators. "Our goal is to get modern technology at a cheaper rate," he said.

Khaleda charge-sheeted in Barapukuria graft case

Former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, 10 powerful ministers of her cabinet and five others were yesterday (Sunday) charge-sheeted in the Barapukuria graft case for alleged embezzlement of a huge amount of government money through a misdeal on coalmining. The Anti-Corruption Commission on February 26 filed the case with a police station in the capital on charge of kickbacks amounting to about Tk 159 crore on the Barapukuria Coalmine deal awarded to the highest bidder instead of the lowest. This was the third-first after her release on bail-charge sheet against the immediate-past PM and BNP chairperson. She was earlier charge-sheeted in Gatco and Niko graft cases. According to sources, it was shown in the charge sheet that prime accused Khaleda, Mannan Bhuiyan, MK Anwar and Shamsul are on bail while Dr Mosharraf and Altaf, who are in jail, were shown arrested in this case. The rest of the accused, including Nizami and Mujaheed, were shown absconding. "As such, the IO applied to the court for issuance of arrest warrants against them," one of the sources said. They further said although some other accused are already on bail, they were shown absconding as the relevant papers were not made available. In the charge sheet it was mentioned that there would be 34 witnesses in the case to testify. The charge sheet was submitted under sections 409/109 of the Penal Code and section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1947.

UN supports election under emergency

UN resident coordinator Renata Lok Dessalian on Monday expressed her support to the Caretaker Government's decision of holding upcoming parliamentary elections under state of emergency. After making a courtesy call on Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury at the ministry to discuss the possible visit of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon next month, she said as City Corporation and municipality elections have been held peacefully under the state of emergency, parliamentary elections may be held in the same manner. She expected that the government will relax emergency as per its previous commitment and if the coming parliamentary poll is held on December 18 in an appropriate environment, the UN will likely send election monitoring teams and observers.

Govt creating commerce friendly climate

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed on Monday formally inaugurated automation of Chittagong Customs House at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital. At a ceremony, he said an environment friendly to commerce, industries and agriculture is building up in the country thanks to the initiatives of his interim administration. He described the businesspeople and industrialists as the drivers of the economy, and urged them to make the best of the business-friendly environment, build industries and create employment. The present government has taken initiative for macro-economic and infrastructural reforms including formulation of proper planning to survive in the competitive world market and achieve

economic stability. He said introduction of the most modern system of taxation with the initiative of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry under intensive supervision of the army is a unique example of development activities under government-private partnership. The first phase of the automated taxation system was introduced at the customs house in the port city on Aug 8, with the online submission of export and import accounts. The Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry initiated the installation of the automation system with Tk 2 crore in line with a memorandum of understanding between the customs authorities and the CCCI on April 13. Datasoft, a private local firm, is handling the automation system.

Last year's record remittance figure exceeded

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury on Monday said that last year's record figure of remittances from workers abroad which was US $6.6 billion has already been overtaken by the figures of the first nine months of the current year, which stand at US $6.8 billion, said a Foreign Ministry release issued to the press. "This is extremely good news for us. We expect the figure to climb even further, and if all goes well, hit US $9 billion", he added. The Foreign Adviser also stated that the market for workers overseas has kept expanding. Till the end of September a record number of 6 lakh 90,000 have already been cleared. Last year the figure for this period was 5 lakh 92,000. "This is also a development that matches our expectations", he added. Iftekhar Chowdhury described the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he made a brief stopover on his way back from New York, as the current largest market. "An average of 40,000 workers is going there every month. Good news is that the UAE has asked for 200 highly skilled engineers. The recruitment process will begin soon", he further said.

Unregistered party not to be allowed to contest poll under own symbol

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said the political parties will have to apply for registration to the election commission within October 15 for contesting ensuing parliamentary polls to be held on December 18 this year. Expressing hope, CEC said all political parties will be able to complete registration with the commission within the timeframe set by the commission if they really want to be registered. Those who are interested to contest the upcoming parliamentary election will have to be registered with election commission. Otherwise, they will not to be allowed to contest national polls," CEC said. CEC further said the parties which will fail to register within the timeframe given by commission, will not be allowed to make alliance with other registered political parties for contesting polls. But, if a non-registered political party wants to make alliance with other registered parties, such non-registered party will have to use election symbol of that party with which it likes to make alliance and its candidates will be considered as candidates of that party, losing own identity, CEC said referring to the new law.

Dhaka inks $3.33 m project documents with UNDP

Bangladesh and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed three project documents involving US$ 3.33 million or Taka 23.31 crore as grant. The grant will be provided by Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Multilateral Fund under Montreal Protocol to implement three projects in Bangladesh, according to a press release here. The projects are Preparation of second national communication of Bangladesh, Phase out of CFC consumption in the manufacture of Aerosol Metered Dose Inhaler (MDI) in Bangladesh and Institutional strengthening for the phase-out of Ozone depleting substances (phase-V). The projects will help Bangladesh prepare and submit its second national communication (SNC) to the conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The projects will also help Bangladesh phase-out the use of Chloro-Fluoro Carbons (CFC) in the manufacture of Metered Dose Inhalers (MDIs) in three pharmaceutical industries by converting the production technology using CFC to using non-CFC.

Long link-road likely to be constructed between BD and Myanmar

A 23 km long link-road between Bangladesh and Myanmar is going to be constructed immediately by the joint efforts of both countries. After coming out of a bilateral talk between a 55- member delegation led by Myanmar's Vice Senior general Maung Aye and Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed at CA's Office, Foreign Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed said "As a symbol of friendship between Bangladesh and Myanmar a 23 km link-road will be constructed by joint effort of the two countries." He said several important pending issues between two countries including return of 21,000 Rohingya refugees, determination of maritime belt and business related issues were discussed between Myanmar delegation and CA. Foreign Adviser stated the Chief Adviser actually placed a proposal before Myanmar delegates to work out a plan to connect China by extending the proposed link-road. "During talks CA expressed the need for determination of sea boundary between two countries. CA also opined that to implement these plans and solve bilateral problems between two countries political wills and directives are needed," Iftekhar told.

Income from RMG export to exceed $25b by 2030

Income from export of readymade garments (RMG) will exceed $ 25 billion by 2030 although right now the country is earning $ 10 billion from this sector, said Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman. At signing of MoU between BGMEA Institute of Fashion and Technology (BIFT)

and London College of Fashion under University of the Arts of London, UK held at BIFT premises in Uttara, he said quoting BGMEA President "following this agreement local garment sector will be developed inasmuch as it will likely earn $ 10 billion from this sector by 2030." Terming this MoU landmark decision for development of Country's apparel sector, he said after this agreement overseas students, teachers and experts will be able to come to Bangladesh and local students of fashion and design will go there resulting into development of expertise in our RMG sector. He further stated such sharing of knowledge will create confidence on Bangladeshi products as our local students and technicians will be imparted training on fashion and design of international level. He called for increase in quality and volume of productivity of RMG goods to be able to sustain in the global market and compete in free market policy. He underscored the necessity of more steps by the government to promote RMG sector further to face the challenges of free market policy because being a private organization BGMEA has too little resource to keep required role in this regard.

Lack of gas fails to promote industrialisation in south-western region

The government initiative to promote industrialisation in the country's southwestern region during the last one decade has met with failure in the absence of gas supply. Once hustling industrial belts of Khalishpur and Rupsha have gradually dying out in the face of uneven competition with those enjoying cheaper fuel supplies of natural gas in other areas. government has developed a large export processing zone (EPZ) at Mongla a decade ago with the hope of creating a regional business hub close to the country's second sea port and exploits its potentials. But the effort has gone in vain. Mongla EPZ could not attract investment as it was expected. Barely 12 industrial units have so far set up out of accommodation facility for 124. Entrepreneurs are willing but they ask for gas supply, said an official. The President of Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Shahruzzaman Mortuza said the region as a whole is lagging far behind in industrialisation mainly because of non-availability of gas. He said Khulna was once in leading position with larger number of manufacturing units. "But most of the small and large industrial units and businesses have either shut down or moved elsewhere," Mortuza told UNB.

SRILANKA:

POLITICAL:

- **Future of the LTTE after the Military Defeat**

- **Sri Lanka President condemns LTTE for the brutal assassination of Major General Janaka Perera and others**
- **SLAF targeted LTTE Peace Secretariat and Political Head Office**

SOCIAL:

- **Sri Lanka Government arranges regular food supply for those civilians trapped in the LTTE controlled areas**

ECONOMIC:

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- **Canadian Government issues agreement for the Sri Lanka Ambassador designate**
- **EU Condemns Anuradhapura bomb blast**
- **US condemned the terrorists attack in Anuradhapura**
- **Canadian Government issues agreement for the Sri Lanka Ambassador designate**

Canadian Government issues agreement for the Sri Lanka Ambassador designate

At last, Canadian Government has issued agreement for the appointment of Daya Perera PC, (82 years) as Sri Lanka High Commissioner to Canada. Sri Lanka President appointed Daya Perera, a well-known criminal lawyer in December 2007, but the Canadian Government delayed the issuance of the Agrement based on simple technical issues. Daya Perera, a former permanent representative for Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York, was appointed to replace the previous High Commissioner, W.S. Karunaratne. It is now believed that despite bereavement in the family, he is expected to travel to Canada shortly to take up the new posting.

Sri Lanka Government arranges regular food supply for those civilians trapped in the LTTE controlled areas

The death toll in Monday (6) morning suicide attack on Major General Janaka Perera (Retd) at Anuradhapura rose to twenty-seven, the Police have appointed several top level teams to commence investigations into the tragedy. The suicide attack injured as many as ninety-four which included seventy men and twenty-four women, but the hospital reports further revealed that some more people have approached Out Patient Department (OPD) directly for treatment since they had received minor injuries.

Future of the LTTE after the Military Defeat

More than three decades, the LTTE has been trying to weaken the democratically elected government in Sri Lanka, primarily using an intelligently crafted terror campaigns and adroit propaganda campaigns, intermittingly switching into political negotiations, however, without any firm commitment, to achieve its messianic goal of carving of a separate state for the Tamils in the north of Sri Lanka. The LTTE, which started its campaign as a small vanguard movement of Tamil insurgency, later developed into a powerful and highly structured terrorist organization with international offices. Over the years it secured adequate support for its activities from the Tamil community and others.

EU Condemns Anuradhapura bomb blast

Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, condemns the suicide blast in Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka) which killed 27 and injured more than 80 people. "I am deeply shocked by the suicide attack at the United National Party office in Anuradhapura this morning. I condemn in the strongest possible terms this appalling act of terrorism which cannot be justified under any circumstances. I send my sincere condolences to the relatives of those killed and injured and sympathy to the Government and people of Sri Lanka for the tragic loss of life," she said.

US condemned the terrorists attack in Anuradhapura

United States has strongly condemned terrorist attacks in Anuradhapura which led to the killing of the Northern Provincial Councilors and others. In a statement released by the US Embassy in Colombo said, that "The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack on October 6 in Anuradhapura that claimed the lives of Major General (retired) Janaka Perera and Dr. Raja Johnpulle and their spouses.

Sri Lanka President condemns LTTE for the brutal assassination of Major General Janaka Perera and others

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse while condemning the covertly and brutal act of terrorism carried out in Anuradhapura today morning in assassinating Major General Janaka Perera, pointed out that the attack was further proof of the need for everyone to unite for the success of the ongoing campaign to eradicate terrorism in the country. He added that in the context of severe setbacks the LTTE is facing in what were reportedly its strongholds in the North; it is now making every attempt to create violent backlashes in other parts of the country, and urged the public to act cautiously in the face of such provocation.

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SLAF targeted LTTE Peace Secretariat and Political Head Office

Sri Lankan Air force yesterday targeted the LTTE Peace Secretariat and the Political Head Office in Kilinochci. Details of damages are not known yet. It was Norwegian Government which funded huge sum of money, amount undisclosed, to build the LTTE's Peace Secretariat as well as the Political Head Office after signing of the peace agreement between the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE in February 2002. According to reports, Norwegian Government not only funded huge amount of money to build those two buildings, but to date it continues to fund a large sum of money for the running of the Peace Secretariat as well as the political Head office, even after Sri Lanka Government has withdrawn from the peace agreement with LTTE, which was brokered by Norway

MALDIVES:

POLITICAL:

- **DhiFM presidential poll stopped after discovering irregularities**
- **No agenda to make Maldives multi religious**
- **Majlis to amend employment law**
- **Election Commission urges for a free and peaceful election**
- **Gayoom admits holding private bank accounts abroad**
- **President appeals to all educators to foster Islamic principles**
- **Gayoom' campaign warns possible defeat**
- **People's Majlis start live broadcast of meetings**
- **Thousand of voters protesting for not having their names on the voter's list**
- **Maldives vote in first multi party presidential election**
- **President nominates 5th member for Anti Corruption Commission**

SOCIAL:

- **50 percent of children use drugs**
- **maldives destroys 20000 Dutch Lady Milk bottles made in China**
- **Tourism employees association calls off strike**

ECONOMIC:

- **Hassan reveals Financial Plan for his manifesto**
- **State media efforts to blindfold the public will not work**

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- **12 foreigners deported**

DhiFM presidential poll stopped after discovering irregularities

The controversial presidential election SMS opinion poll conducted by leading private radio broadcaster DhiFM was stopped last night after DhiFM discovered several SMS messages have been received before the starting time and without the knowledge of owners of telephones. DhiFM has blamed national telecommunication service provider Dhiraagu for the manipulation which Dhiraagu has denied. Dhiraagu has said SMS messages sent by their customers have come from Australia. These SMS messages have started coming before 11pm last night which was the starting time of the poll. DhiFM has invited a team of leading journalists to their station every week during the time time of the poll to witness the process for ensuring its transparency. DhiFM Chief Executive Ibrahim Khaleel has said Dhiraagu must take responsibility for the irregularity last night. Khaleel also said Dhiraagu has assured DhiFM during their discussions with Dhiraagu senior officials before the poll was organised there will be no external manipulation. Dhiraagu has said there can be a technical problem and if there were such a problem it will arise from the Dhiraagu system Khaleel added.

Hassan reveals Financial Plan for his manifesto

Independent presidential candidate, former Attorney General Dr. Hassan Saeed has said that in order to fulfill the pledges made in his presidential manifesto, government expenditure and waste will be minimized and additional ways to obtain revenue will be sought. Dr. Hassan made the statement speaking at a ceremony held at Giyaasuhdheen School last night to reveal how he planned to secure funds and how much funds are required to implement his manifesto. Hassan said he was the first presidential contesting the elections to reveal a financial plan on implementing the manifesto. Providing the details of his financial plan, Hassan's running mate Dr. Ahmed Shaheed said Hassan's manifesto will be spread out over a five year period. He said for the first year, Rf.3.68 Billion will be required and that Rf.1.13 Billion will secured by minimizing government wastes and expenditure and that the remaining Rf.1.94 Billion will be secured through

tax. According to Shaheed the current tax system will be revised and corporate tax will be introduced. He further said if the free aid were to be taken in to account, a sum of Rf.4.34 Billion can be shown as revenue in the first year's budget of a Hassan's government. Shaheed said after spending for first year requirements of a Hassan's government, a sum of 0.90 Billion will still be remain for the national reserve. Dr. Shaheed at last night meeting detailed on how funding will be secured to execute his manifesto, what will be done to reduce government waste and expenditure and how the national reserve will be increased in a government formed under Hassan's leadership.

No agenda to make Maldives multi religious

Maldivian Democratic Party (DRP) Deputy Campaign Manager Shehenaz (Shehey) has given assurances that the copies of emails, being circulated by party opponents, incriminating the party of having an agenda to make the country a multi religious state are bogus. Dhivehi Rayithunge Party (DRP) yesterday at the daily news briefing has exposed copies of emails exchanged between MDP Deputy Campaign Manager Shehey and key MDP officials which expresses that Maldives can be transformed to multi religious state within one year. MDP last night at a news conference has made public copies of email, which they say are the original copies of the email altered by DRP. The only difference between the copies provided by both parties is the inclusion of one sentence in DRP provided copy. All the rest remains exactly the same including time, date and mail account. Shehey claimed that she could show to media, if original message directly from her inbox, if required. To prove her point she took some reporters, including the Miadhu Daily's correspondent, to the business center of Nalahiya Hotel where the news conference was held and even showed her inbox. The mail which she showed was obviously a previous message which has the same timings and as date given on DRP provided email copy.

Majlis to amend employment law

The People's Majlis will consider a bill to amend the employment law in tomorrow's sitting which will is expected to solve some critical problems faced mainly by those working in tourist resorts and tourism industry. They have appealed the government and other concerned sources to amend the law in a bid to address their grievances. Having failed to receive a favorable response to their request, there have been some protests and petitions by the employees of the tourism sector to demand and fulfill those issues the law has failed to address for a large number of employees working in different sectors and locations. There were similar concerns from employees of other sectors. Employees of the tourism sector have subsequently warned to stage a mass strike after many attempts with the government in a bid amend the law and alleviate their problems. Employees of the tourism sector have decided to hold their strike on 4 October which would have resulted in stopping the services in many resorts. However after learning the government has submitted the necessary amendment to the Majlis at the last

meeting which bill will be considered today, they decided to hold the strike on 7 October if the law is not amended accordingly.

Election Commission urges for a free and peaceful election

Election Commissioner Mohamed Ibrahim has called on the people to make presidential election free and peaceful election. He said the Election Commission has made every effort to make the first multi-party presidential election of the country free and fair. All arrangements have been made in capital Male' atolls, resorts and industrial islands for the the vote. Maldivians living in Colombo, Trivandrum, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore can also vote in the election. There are 208252 eligible voters and for the first time young Maldivians between 18 and 21 will be eligible to vote under the new freedoms enshrined in the new Constitution.

Maldives destroys 20000 Dutch Lady Milk bottles made in China

Maldivian authorities have ordered to destroy more than 20,000 bottles of Dutch Lady Milk manufactured in China in the wake of detection of melamine in Chinese milk products which has set off a global food safety scare. Maldives imports a large quantity of Dutch Lady Milk products but according to official sources Dutch Lady plastic strawberry milk bottles were the only product manufactured in China and tainted with melamine which was imported and used in the Maldives. There are no infant or children formula or milk products imported from China. Director General of Maldives Food and Drug Authority, MFDA Moosa Anver said they have taken quick and stern action in this scare. These measures were taken jointly with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. “We were on full alert and have taken all necessary measures. Fortunately there is no baby formula or other products. Only one variety with Chinese origin is imported. Other varieties of Dutch Lady Products imported to the country are manufactured in other countries. We have checked shops and retailers and found about 20,000 bottles of Chinese origin. We have ordered to destroy them “he said.

Gayoom admits holding private bank accounts abroad

Dhivehi Rahyithunge Party (DRP) presidential candidate President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has admitted to holding private bank accounts in several foreign countries. Presidential candidate Gayoom made the admission speaking in radio show ‘Jadhalu’ aired by popular radio channel HFM. Speaking on HFM radio show Gayoom said even though he has several private bank accounts in various foreign countries, he actually has very little money. Country’s main opposition party Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has been openly saying that Gayoom poses private bank accounts in some European countries. When HFM presenter asked whether MDP

claims were true and if so how much money doe he have, Gayoom replied that although he has private accounts in some foreign countries he had very little money and it put a figure on it would be difficult. “I have very little money, I just can’t say how much it is, just like that , but I do have accounts in some foreign countries, it is private accounts opened by me, but there is very little money in it, but that money , is not in them, it is a big lie” Gayoom said.

50 percent of children use drugs

Fifty percent of our children are users of some form of illegal drugs, President of Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) Umar Naseer has said. He made the statement speaking to the people of Laamu Fonadhoo while on a campaign tour of the atoll. Umar said drug traffickers have constructed high rise buildings using money obtained from selling drugs. He said while the traffickers are benefiting it is the future of the country and the future of our children and children’s children that is at risk. “Approximately 750 million rufiyaa is spent on buying drugs annually, and about 50 percent of children are using some form of illegal drugs, the country’s jail is full of drug offenders, courts are finding it difficult to cope, so it is imperative that we destroy this system of drug smuggling and trading” Umar said. From Fonadhoo, IDP Presidential candidate Umar travelled on to the island of Maavah. In Maavah, Umar met the people discussed the issues and difficulties faced with the people and explained his policies. Sharing his policies with Maavah islanders Umar said pressing problems faced with the Maldivian people such as housing issues, the menace of drugs, health and social issues can only be addressed by him.

State media efforts to blindfold the public will not work

Despite attempts by state controlled media to blindfold the public, the love, respect and the overwhelming support the people have for Jumhoory Party’s presidential candidate Qasim Ibrahim will not get reduced, JP’s running mate Ahmed Ali Sawaadh has said. After participating in the vehicle round which commenced in Hithadhoo, Sawaadh shared his thoughts and aspirations with people of the atoll. “Today we have seen how prepared we are to elect Qasim for the changes expected by the people, this shows that Qasim is not only supported and loved by other parts of the country but also here is this atoll as well” Sawaadh , a native of the atoll said. Speaking on the same tone, Qasim said state media is trying to mislead the Maldivian people on the support and love afforded to Qasim Ibrahim by the Maldivian people. He said this is going on very openly and that even the people are aware of it.

President appeals to all educators to foster Islamic principles

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has appealed to all educators to foster in their students, Islamic principles and good moral values and to prepare them to become productive and responsible citizens. He made the statement in his message on the occasion of World Teachers' Day 2008, which is being marked. Highlighting on this year's Teachers' Day theme "Teachers Matter", President Gayoom called on teachers to focus on continuous upgrading of their knowledge. In this regard, President noted that work was been done to provide more professional development opportunities for teachers.

Tourism employees association calls off strike

The Tourism Employees Association of Maldives, TEAM has called off their peaceful strike which they have planned for today to further demand the rights of employees working in tourist resorts and industry. TEAM was planning to hold this strike on 4 October but postponed it after the government has tabled a bill to amend the employment law with the demands made by TEAM. They have said earlier they will not hold the strike if the necessary amendments are incorporated in the employment law. The People's Majlis in its meeting yesterday has debated the bill on the employment law with several amendments. The Majlis has passed the bill with most of the amendments including the crucial aspects demanded by TEAM. TEAM has organized the peaceful strike where almost all employees working in the industry were to participate which might have paralyzed the hugely popular and important industry. But TEAM was cautious about such a strike and thus worked very hard with the government and other stakeholders to find an amicable solution.

Gayoom' campaign warns possible defeat

In a startling new development of the highly competitive presidential race, officials of independent presidential candidate Dr. Hassan Saeed has strongly suggested President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom who is contesting for a seventh term may be defeated as he will not be able to secure an absolute majority in the first round. The news came as a serious blow to President Gayoom who is the presidential candidate contesting from the government party DRP. Dr. Mohamed Jameel from Dr. Hassan Saeed's camp divulged this information referring to an email a copy of which given to media, they said they have received from a very reliable source. The mail addressed to President's eldest son Faris Maumoon from a Bob and Mark dated 5 October said the polling suggests that Gayoom will win the most votes in the election on Wednesday, but he will fall short of an absolute majority.

People's Majlis start live broadcast of meetings

In a historic move towards greater freedom of expression and dissemination of information, the People's Majlis has started live broadcast of its meetings yesterday. The decision followed Majlis signing an agreement with two private broadcasters DhiFM and AtollTV on Sunday. The issue of broadcasting meetings of both Special Majlis and People's Majlis was one of the hottest subjects demanded during the debates of the constitutional reform by many opposition members, most notably Laamu member Moosa Maniku. Speaker of the Special Majlis Gasim Ibrahim was instrumental in moving forward the matter responding favourably to these demands. Gasim took the decision to start broadcasting Special Majlis meetings and warned he would assign the work to private broadcasters if the government objects to it. Information Ministry responded to the request with some reluctance, conditions and censorship and Majlis meetings were broadcast as the last programme of the day in midnight and early mornings. TV Maldives started broadcasting Majlis meetings in June last year. Many opposition members of the Majlis expressed serious concern about censoring and broadcasting the meetings late in the night interfering sleep and rest of many people.

Thousand of voters protesting for not having their names on the voter's list

Thousands of voters have protested near the main Election Administrative Office in Male' for not having their names on the voter's list. Protesters have shouted angry remarks after they have been told their names are not registered and cannot vote in the crucial election. Elections officials admitted there are problems but preferred to settle the matter after consulting with candidates. One of the Commissioners has earlier told media there are many errors and misunderstandings in the list of voters and hence the election is not likely to be a free and fair election. The dispute was quickly resolved after a meeting of Election Commissioners and candidates. There was suggestion to delay the election for about a month to give sufficient time for better organization. But except for one candidate all others felt election must proceed. However, there were concerns by some candidates and parties from the beginning about rushing into the election after ratifying the Constitution only on 7 August 2008.

Maldives vote in first multi party presidential election

Maldives is voting in the first multi-party presidential election today to elect a new president. Six candidates are contesting in the election.They are incumbent President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party, DRP, Mohamed Nasheed, Anni of the main opposition

Maldivian Democratic Party, MDP, independent candidate former Attorney General Hassan Saeed, former Finance Minister billionaire Gasim Ibrahim of Jumhoory Party, JP, Male' member of the People's Majlis Ibrahim Ismail of the Social Liberal Party, SLP, Umar Naseer of the Islamic Democratic Party, IDP. The election is creating history in the island republic which has embraced far reaching democratic reform and adopted a new Constitution on 7 August 2008 after a process of lengthy and heated debate in the People's Special Majlis assembled on 19 July 2004. The reform agenda of the country is culmination of an unprecedented struggle to introduce a liberal democracy in the country.

12 foreigners deported

12 foreign national have been deported after they have assaulted and harassed a group of Maldivian workers in Dholhiyadhoo Island in Shaviani Atoll. The 12 foreigners are Bangladeshis and they have attacked these Maldivians while they were working on contract in the island. Dholhiyadhoo Island is being developed as a new tourist resort of star class. The incident took place on 12 August when the group of Maldivians was attacked causing bodily harm to them. Police have done a full investigation into the incident and the 12 foreigner have confessed of their guilt. According to reliable information, the Controller of Immigration has decided to deport these people and they will not be allowed to visit Maldives for a period of 10 years. These people have been deported on 15 September.

President nominates 5th member for Anti Corruption Commission

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has submitted the name of Ali Rasheed Umar of M. Aadhilleege for appointment as the fifth member of the interim Anti Corruption Commission to be established under the new Constitution. People's Majlis in its meeting on Monday has approved names of member of the former Anti Corruption Board Abdul Raheem Abdul Rahman, former member of the Anti Corruption Board Abdullah Adam, G Dh Thinadhoo Halaveli Abdullah Hilmy and S. Hithadhoo Ranfas Hassan Luthfy for appointment as members to the Anti Corruption Commission. The fifth name Saud Ibrahim of R Innamaadhoo was not accepted by the Majlis. During the brief debate before the vote on these names on Monday, some members severely criticised President Gayoom for not sending more names for the Commission so that the Majlis could decide more suitable members from the list of applicants. They said President Gayoom lacks sincerity to the purpose and objectives of the Constitution and law. Members of the

Majlis also criticised the committee for not doing their a responsible job in recommending the names for the Anti Corruption Commission.

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- NC to launch national campaign
- NC deplores govt apathy towards conflict victims
- Raja, rajauta system abolished, DPM informs Mustangi Raja
- Maoists to hold national conference on Nov 10
- Koirala says he wants to end 'indiscipline' in NC
- Armed groups to get invitation after Dashain
- Inmates who have completed one-third of sentence could be released
- FM headed for US
- Koirala vows to bring NC back to its pre-election form
- Maoist hardliners pressure for People's Republic
- Army integration will be completed without hassles, claims DPM Gautam

SOCIAL:

- Govt preparing to strictly control alcohol consumption

ECONOMIC:

- Acharya calls world community for financial support to LDCs
- Oli calls Maoists' 'talks' of establishing people's republic a farce

GEO-STRATEGIC:

NC deplores govt apathy towards conflict victims

The main opposition party Nepali Congress (NC) has deplored what it calls the government's apathy towards victims of conflict. Referring to the police highhandedness in evicting protesting conflict victims who were staging sit-in in front of ministerial quarters, the party has accused the Maoist-led government of ignoring their plight. In a statement issued by the party, the NC has said that the new government has chosen to disregard the problems faced by conflict victims. Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked the government to refrain from using force to quell peaceful protestors. It deplored the use of force by police in dispersing the sit-in staged by conflict victims. The NHRC has also urged the protestors to make their protests totally peaceful and refrain from infringing on the rights of other people including the right for free movement.

NC to launch national campaign

The main opposition party Nepali Congress (NC) has decided to launch a nationwide campaign to reinvigorate the party. The party will hold a mass meeting in Biratnagar on October 25 to kick off the campaign. The mass meeting is being coordinated by Morang district Congress committee, according to its chief Amrit Aryal. Aryal informed that party president and former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala will address the mass meeting – the first being organised by NC after it became the main opposition party.

Raja, rajauta system abolished, DPM informs Mustangi Raja

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam met with Mustangi Raja Jigme Palbar Bista and informed him about the government's decision to root out the system of Raja, rajauta. As per the system, there were four petty kings recognised by the government as cultural custodian of certain areas. There were such nominal kings in Mustang, Salyan, Jajarkot and Bajhang. During the meeting, Bista accepted the government's decision and promised to work for the welfare of the local culture as a commoner. He also requested the government for support in his health treatment

Acharya calls world community for financial support to LDCs

Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations Madhu Raman Acharya has called upon the international community to undertake a comprehensive approach to financing development in the developing countries. Addressing the General Debate of the Second Committee, sixty-third Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Acharya stressed the need of a broad and meaningful preparatory process for the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in 2011 with a view to achieving a new strategic and result-oriented action plan for the next decade. Recalling the mid-term review of the Almaty Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Counties (LLDCs) last week, he underlined the need for sustained trade-enhancing support measures and higher investment in transit transport infrastructure of the LLDCs, a statement by permission mission of Nepal to UN said. Acharya said, the post-Kyoto regime should address the serious impacts of climate change on the least developed countries, small island nations, and the mountainous communities. Informing the Committee about Nepal's fundamental political transformation and the economic challenges which involves the tasks of developing rural infrastructure and that of the post-conflict reconstruction, he asked all the development partners to support national initiatives through the effective mobilisation of financial and technical resources.

Govt preparing to strictly control alcohol consumption

The government is preparing to bring in stringent rules to control the consumption of alcohol. Saying that drinking alcohol is one of the reasons for rising crime and social problems, the government is going to ban the sales and consumption of alcohol except in prescribed areas and in prescribed times. First, the government has asked the retailers to finish off their current stock of alcohol within few weeks after which only the licensed retailers will be allowed to trade in the alcohol. “Then, we will subsequently announce strict measures whereby the alcohol will have to be sold from a place where everyone can see, within certain time and to certain age-group of people,” said Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam. “Those who want to buy alcohol will have to give their name, their father’s name and their grandfather’s name to the seller. He will have to produce citizenship certificate and, then only, he can take the alcohol to his home for consumption,” Gautam said. The minister said that the government will also take steps to regularize the traditional consumption of alcohol in certain communities. “There are communities like Newar and Magar where alcohol consumption is linked with tradition and religion. That will be regularized,” he said.

Maoists to hold national conference on Nov 10

The central committee of the Maoists ended, Tuesday, after deciding to hold national conference on November 10. "The central committee meeting ended and we have now decided to settle all the issues through the National Conference, which will be held on November 10," Barsha Man Pun Ananta told Nepal FM. Ananta said that the national conference will forge party's future action plans and strategies. At the CC meeting, Prime Minister and party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda is said to have proposed to go for National Conference to settle debates on what sort of "People's Republic" the party wants to establish, among others.

Koirala says he wants to end 'indiscipline' in NC

Former prime minister and Nepali Congress (NC) president Girija Prasad Koirala has said that he will get rid off 'indiscipline' in the party. Stating that NC has a history of discipline and dutifulness, Koirala said a campaign will be launched to strengthen the party organisation in the coming days. Meanwhile, the NC Morang district committee is organising a mass meeting in Biratnagar on October 25. The mass meeting will be addressed by party president Koirala. This will be the first mass meeting of NC since it became main opposition party.

Armed groups to get invitation after Dashain

Minister for Commerce and Supplies Rajendra Mahato has said the government will send formal letter to armed groups in the Terai inviting them for peace talks soon after Dashain festival. Speaking at the Reporters Club, Mahato said the government would not resort to the policy of suppression but rather make every effort to meet the demands of the rebellion groups through peaceful dialogue. Stating that indirect communication has been established with the armed outfits, Mahato assured of security to leaders who sit for negotiations. Minister for Science and Technology Ganesh Shah also reiterated the government's position to find solution of all problems through peaceful talks. Meanwhile, leaders have criticised the Maoists for taking up the issue of People's Republic on the eve of drafting a new constitution. Pradip Gyawali of UML rejected the idea of establishing People's Republic immediately and stressed on the need to concentrate on writing a democratic constitution for Nepal. Refuting allegations that Maoists are head.

Inmates who have completed one-third of sentence could be released

The government is preparing to release prison inmates who have completed one-third of their prison sentence. "All prisoners who have completed one-third of their sentence except those facing grave charges of nine kinds including rape, human trafficking, wildlife trafficking and so on will be released," Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam said. "There will be some court procedures and legal procedures that will have to be first completed though," he added. "We are also planning to release inmates who face political charges," he said. Earlier the cabinet had decided to release inmates who have completed fifty percent of their sentence. Gautam said that the cabinet has now made fresh decision to release those completing 33 percent of sentence.

FM headed for US

Finance Minister Dr. Baburam Bhattarai is leaving, Tuesday, for Washington DC, the United States to attend the annual meeting of the board of governors of the World Bank. Dr. Bhattarai will brief the World Bank officials regarding the new government's plan for economic revolution in Nepal. He is leading a three-member Nepali delegation, which includes Finance Secretary Rameshwore Khanal and chief of Foreign Aid Coordination Division of the Finance Ministry Krishna Gyawali.

Koirala vows to bring NC back to its pre-election form

Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala has claimed that he will bring the party back to its pre-election form within just three months. Speaking to party workers in his hometown Biratnagar on Monday, Koirala said he was confident that the party would regain its lost strength within that timeline. In the meantime, the octogenarian leader threw a clear hit that he was not yet ready to transfer leadership to what is known within

the Congress party as second generation, saying he would not retire unless the party regained its old form. The NC president also asked the cadres to resolve internal differences and focus on rebuilding the party organization.

Oli calls Maoists' 'talks' of establishing people's republic a farce

A senior leader of ruling coalition partner Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) has termed the 'talks' of establishing people's republic by some Maoist leaders as a 'farce.'"They are only trying to fool the people by talking about people's republic," Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, UML standing committee member, said, speaking at a programme in Jhapa. He also blasted the decision of the Maoist-led government to raise the monthly salaries of People's Liberation Army (PLA) by Rs 2000. "They are the combatants who are being looked after by the government in the camps. It is wrong to raise their salaries because the salaries of government employees have been increased.

Maoist hardliners pressure for People’s Republic

Hardliners of the CPN (Maoists) have put pressure on the party leadership not to deviate from party's aim to establish 'people's republic' in Nepal. Speaking during the central committee meeting at Baluwatar Monday, the leaders stressed the need to carve strategies to establish People’s Republic at any cost. According to Hari Bhakta Kadel, a central committee member, the CC members suggested a rethink over the current 'liberal line' taken by the party and go for policies that could help establish a communist rule at the earliest. Other leaders, including party spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara, refused to speak to journalists. The central committee members have completed their turn to speak on the political report presented by party chairman and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Army integration will be completed without hassles, claims DPM Gautam

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam have said that the army integration will be completed without hassles. "We will soon form a special committee as per the constitutional provision. It will decide whether to integrate all of the PLA or those who fulfill certain parameters into the Nepali Army," he said, adding, "This process will be carried out in such a manner that everyone will be content." Addressing an interaction programme, at the Reporters' Club, Gautam dismissed possibilities of collapse of the current government. "There is no alternative to this coalition. Any possibility of government's collapse arises only when there is an alternative," he said. Gautam claimed that with his new measures, the security situation in the country will be maintained up to full satisfaction within next six months. He vowed to control the nightclubs and dance

bars. "They are the center of crime and immorality. The government will not compromise in this issue," he said.

MYANMAR:

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- Myanmar junta raises suppression, says opposition
- Myanmar army moves against refugees, aid organization says

SOCIAL:

- Burma Ruby Ban Provides Opportunity for Collectors Universe Colored Gemstone Subsidiary
- UN expert outlines steps for improving human rights
- U.N. chief seeks less talk, more action

ECONOMIC:

- PTTEP sees Myanmar M-9 gas project ready end of 2011
- Rigorous checking on border trade route
- Chinese milk scandal provokes confusion among businesses
- Myanmar agrees to export gas if new reserve found

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- New role for an old Indian road
- Myanmar agrees to move forward hydropower plant proposal
- Burmese soldier murdered on Burma-India border
- Myanmar offers help to B'desh for hydro power project
- Top Burmese junta leader arrives in Bangladesh for talks
- Bangladesh proposes talks for link with China, Myanmar

Myanmar junta raises suppression, says opposition

Myanmar's military rulers have stepped up suppression of political opponents ahead of the country's elections in 2010, an opposition party spokesman said. Nyan Win, of the National League for Democracy, said many party members arrested since last year were now facing trials, with at least 30 having been sentenced to at least 2 1/2 years in prison between September and early this month. The regime has increased pressure on opponents and critics "so that they can manipulate the elections any way they like," he said. The junta has announced elections in 2010 as part of a "roadmap to democracy" that critics have slammed as a sham designed to cement the military's power. A military-backed constitution was approved in a national referendum in May, but the party charges that the vote was unfair.

New role for an old Indian road

The Stilwell Road, built during World War II as a strategic link between India and Myanmar (then Burma), is being resurrected as part of India's "Look East" policy of improving economic links with its Southeast Asian neighbors. The 1,726 kilometer road, named after General Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, was built in the latter months of the war to supply weapons to Chiang Kai Shek, China's leader during the Second Sino-Japanese War, as his Kuomintang forces battled the retreating Japanese in China's Yunnan province. It was constructed as alternative to a hazardous air supply route to Kunming dubbed the "aluminum trail" due to the litter of crashed aircraft that marked its way through the mountains. The road was opened on May 20, 1945 after 28,000 US and British engineers completed what they called "the toughest job". Their efforts inspired the 1945 film Stilwell Road which starred Ronald Reagan as its lead narrator.

Myanmar agrees to move forward hydropower plant proposal

Visiting Myanmar high official agreed to move forward a Bangladesh proposal to set up a hydro power plant project in Myanmar from which Bangladesh will get electricity. This came during the meeting here between Myanmar Energy Minister Brig General Lun Thi and his counterpart, the Bangladesh caretaker government Chief Adviser's Special Assistant for Power and Energy Ministry M Tamim. As per the proposal, Bangladesh will build up the plant in Myanmar at its own cost and get 70 percent of the electricity from the project while Myanmar will get 30 percent as royalty. Tamim after the meeting told reporters that the neighboring country's minister assured him of taking necessary steps to move forward the scheme. The hydropower-project proposal was initiated by Bangladesh about two years ago. Both sides also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to implement the project.

Burma Ruby Ban Provides Opportunity for Collectors Universe Colored Gemstone Subsidiary

A leading provider of value-added authentication and grading services to dealers and collectors of high-value collectibles, diamonds and colored gemstones, commented today on the opportunity for increased gemstone documentation created by the recently enacted legislation banning the importation of Burma rubies and the promulgation of implementation by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act of 2008 provides for a ban on importation of rubies originally mined in Burma, now known as Myanmar, with enforcement by CBP focusing on documentation to support the origin of the ruby as not from Burma. According to CBP, Phase 1 of the implementation requires supporting documentation that the ruby did not

originate from Burma and to maintain that information for five years. Phase 2 of the implementation will be developed over the next several months to improve the verification process. American Gemological Laboratories, a subsidiary of Collectors Universe, is one of three major gemstone laboratories in the United States that has the spectrographic technology and trained personnel to analyze gemstones, including rubies, to provide high confidence analysis of the country of origin. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, in the last reporting period of 2006, the United States imported 3.68 million carats of rubies.

PTTEP sees Myanmar M-9 gas project ready end of 2011

PTT Exploration and Production, a unit of Thailand's top energy firm, said on Wednesday it expected its M-9 natural gas project in Myanmar to be completed by the end of 2011."It will be done by the end of 2011," Asdakorn Limpiti, vice president in PTTEP's strategy and capability development division, told Reuters at the Africa Upstream 2008 oil conference in Cape Town.

Rigorous checking on border trade route

Travellers are being rigorously checked at military checkpoints, especially between Lajayang and Garayang Villages on the illegal Sino-Burma border trade route in Kachin State, northern Burma by the Burmese Army, since Monday (October 6), said travellers. Cars and people are not being allowed after 6 p.m. between Myitkyina and Laiza for security reasons, said sources close to the Burmese Army. People from both the State Peace and Development Council (SDPC) and the KIO between Myitkyina and Laiza are affected by this order. The orders have come from the junta's Northern Command HQ based in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. Several travellers told KNG today, that every car carrying passengers and motorcyclists are being stopped at more than five multi-security checkpoints between the two villages. People have to get down from their cars and motorcycles and cross the checkpoints on foot.

Burmese soldier murdered on Burma-India border

Burmese soldiers have been deployed to an area along the border with India where a lance corporal from Light Infantry Battalion 228 was killed and his gun taken on 23 September. The lance corporal was killed on a jungle path regularly used by black market traders near Lailet village in Falam Township, Chin state. Since his death, soldiers from LIB 228 and others stationed in Kalay, Sagaing division, have been deployed to the area. A police officer on duty at an Indian

police station in Kyanphaing told DVB that police were still investigating the incident, but said that India was not involved in the murder. "There has been no involvement in this matter on the part of India. The Myanma soldiers crossed the border and demanded money from merchants," the officer said.

Chinese milk scandal provokes confusion among businesses

A government warning to people of possible contamination from Chinese milk and milk products has negatively impacted Burmese markets and sown confusion among consumers, say local businessmen. A domestic dairy company, Diary Queen, in Mandalay, said that in addition to having to prove that its products are free of the chemical melamine, it also has to do extra work in advertising through newspapers. "We take our raw materials from Poland and other parts of Europe. And all of them are tested and free of chemicals, but we have to re-advertise to convince our customers," an official at the company explained. The official said they produce baby cereals, condensed milk and other milk related products, all of which are approved by the Food and Drug Authority (FDA) of Burma, yet the company has been forced to do extra work to convince customers in the wake of the Chinese milk scandal.

UN expert outlines steps for improving human rights

Improving the situation of human rights in Myanmar is still a challenging task, according to the independent United Nations expert on the issue, who has outlined a series of measures for the South-East Asian as it proceeds with its "road map to democracy" announced earlier this year.

Respect for international human rights standards is indispensable in paving the road to democracy," Tomás Ojea Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, writes in a **report**. "Myanmar is going through a unique moment in its political history," he says, noting that the country's new Constitution was finalized in February and adopted through a referendum in May. "The next step in the road map for national reconciliation and democratic transition is the election in 2010." Mr. Quintana proposes four core human rights elements to be completed by the Government before the 2010 elections. The first is to review and amend those domestic laws which limit fundamental rights – such as freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly and association – and contravene the new Constitution and international human rights standards. He stresses that if those general elections are prepared and conducted in an atmosphere in which human rights are fully respected, "the process will be credible, resulting in progressive achievement of democratic values.

Myanmar agrees to export gas if new reserve found

Myanmar will export natural gas to Bangladesh if it finds new gas reserves while it has shown interest in setting up a hydropower project in that country from where electricity could be supplied to Bangladesh. The decision came out of a meeting between Myanmar's Energy Minister Brig General Lun Thi and Prof M Tamim, chief adviser's special assistant for power and energy ministry. The same day the two countries agreed to start soon construction of the proposed 25-kilometre link road expected to ensure better connectivity between them and eventually connect the former to China. The understanding was reached when visiting Myanmarese Construction Minister Saw Tun called on Communications and Housing and Public Works Adviser Major General (retd) Ghulam Quader at his office. Talking to The Daily Star in the evening, Prof Tamim said, "In principle, Myanmar has no restriction on exporting gas to us. They are open to discuss with us the gas export issue. That country will explore two new potential fields in December." The neighbour on the east expressed positive interest in both ideas, as Bangladesh has a huge demand for power as well as for fertilisers including urea which requires gas for its production.

Myanmar offers help to B'desh for hydro power project

As per the proposal, Bangladesh will build up the plant at its own cost and get 70 per cent of the electricity from the project, while Myanmar will get 30 per cent as royalty, Bangladesh Power and Energy Minister M Tamim said here. Dr Tamim said he discussed with the visiting Myanmar Energy Minister Brig Gen Lun Thi, two particular issues-- gas import and setting up hydro power project. He said it has offered Myanmar to import gas on two modes, either purchase on cash basis or set up a fertilizer plant under a joint venture. Bangladesh will provide land and expertise while Myanmar will provide its gas and then both the countries can share the output. But the visiting Minister informed that his country has no available gas right at this moment to export to Bangladesh as it has already signed deals with China and Thailand to export its gas from the existing fields. Mr Tamim said, the Myanmar Minister also told him that if any new gas is discovered from the ongoing exploration, then it would consider the gas export to Bangladesh.

U.N. chief seeks less talk, more action

Submitting his second annual report on the organization which he heads, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon says the United Nations must resist tendencies to simply call for action and instead focus on enhancing its own operational capacity. Ban's annual report draws attention to an increasing workload for the international body, citing a litany of successes over the past year

while appealing for member states to charge the body with an increased ability to deliver concrete results. "To meet growing needs and high expectations, we must enhance our operational delivery," assessed the Secretary General. "This means concentrating our resources where the Organization can make the biggest difference. We cannot just make promises or call on others to act; we cannot wait for solutions to emerge." His words seemed to echo the growing number of pleas from Burma activists and interest groups urging the United Nations to act, and not simply issue repeated calls for what it would like to see happen in the Southeast Asian country. Yet, the 71-page summary of the past year failed to make any direct reference to the situation in Burma and the Secretary General's attempts at facilitating a process of national reconciliation, reform and respect for rights in the country.

Myanmar army moves against refugees, aid organization says

Myanmar's army and their allies the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have launched an offensive against Karen refugees in the border region with Thailand, an aid organization said Tuesday. Speaking from the border town Mae Sot in northern Thailand, Help without Frontiers, an Italian-based organization aimed at helping refugees of the long-running Karen insurgency, said several villages have been overrun already. "The villagers are chased, rice barns and food are sequestered or destroyed, large cornfields are burned as well as several houses in different villages," the NGO said in a statement. Five schools and two hospitals the organization was operating in the region with donations from Europe had to be closed. The helpers were still trying to treat the often heavily injured victims despite the fighting.

Top Burmese junta leader arrives in Bangladesh for talks

Burma's second ranking official has arrived in Bangladesh for talks that will focus on border issues and a possible land leasing deal for Bangladeshi farmers. Vice Senior General Maung Aye brought an entourage of 55 officials with him, including seven ministers, for the three-day visit. During meetings with Bangladeshi officials the delegation will discuss sea border issues, cross-border road projects and a plan to lease border land to farmers in Bangladesh for cultivation. The establishment of a cross-border road is expected to top the agenda. The road is part of a plan to create an overland link between Bangladesh and China.

Bangladesh proposes talks for link with China, Myanmar

Bangladesh on Tuesday proposed a tripartite meeting to discuss the possibility of linking the South Asian country with China via a cross-border road with Myanmar, an official said. Bangladesh's chief foreign policy adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed presented the proposal at a meeting with General Maung Aye, a high-ranking member of Myanmar's military junta, who is on a three-day official visit to Bangladesh. Maung Aye, vice chairman of State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar, leads a 55-member delegation including seven government ministers. Dhaka has made the cross-border road, an approximately 120-kilometre overland link to China, a key point on the visit's agenda. Myanmar officials did not respond immediately on the proposal saying they would think need to think it over. Other topics under discussions were disputes over a maritime boundary, and leasing of Myanmar land to Bangladeshi farmers for cultivation.

Bhutan:

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Apple season ends on a sweet note

A slow and unsure start to this year's apple business ended on a positive note with those in the trade smiling sweetly. Apple quality and quantity was good and, as the season nears its end, prices went as high as US$ 670 a metric tonne (MT), the highest in recent years. Records with the Bhutan Agricultural Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA) in Phuentsholing showed that the total export has increased significantly compared to last year. This year, between August 25 and October 2, a total of 1,157.8 MT of apples worth Nu 21.204 million was exported to Bangladesh and 2,332.07 MT worth Nu 21.993 million to India. Last year, only 665.266 MT was exported to Bangladesh and 2,255.057 MT to India. At the start of the season, floor price was fixed at US$ 500 per MT, the same as last season. Widening work on the Thimphu-Phuentsholing highway, which caused several roadblocks, discouraged many buyers from Bangladesh this season. But Indian importers from the neighbouring states of Assam and Bengal more than filled the gap. Exporter Namgyal Wangchuk of Pinnga export said that he could export only 20 trucks of apples to Bangladesh this year. Pinnga exported more than 40 trucks to India. Apples to India were sold at Nu 500 per carton (about 25 kg). Indian importers also bought Bangladesh-bound rejected apples. Export rejected apples were sold to Indian buyers at Nu 250 to 300 per box. An Indian buyer from Bihar, Rangit Singh, who has been in the apple business for eight years, said that even export reject apples this year were of good quality. "The quality has really improved this season along with bumper production in Paro," he said.

Another appointment in ACC court

Twice eliminated candidate for the post of managing director of the Woodcraft Centre in Thimphu, Ngeema Sangay Tshempo, has appealed to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), calling the selection process "tainted, unfair and corrupt." In the first selection interview, the present director of department of industries, Sangay Wangdi was selected. He was supposed to join office in September but had to withdraw his appointment after the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) objected on grounds that he had not resigned from his current position and did not have its formal approval. Ngeema S Tshempo was second in line. Ngeema S Tshempo, the former People' Democratic Party candidate from Dagana, said that, since he was second in line, he should have been given preference because it was logical, time and cost effective for the organisation. "It was the board of Woodcraft Centre's responsibility to check if candidates had fulfilled all criteria and completed formalities but the board did not do so," he said. This is the second time that a candidate has appealed to ACC regarding the selection of Bhutanese corporation executives. The first appeal to ACC was on the appointment of Bhutan Post's new chief executive officer (CEO) in September. The Woodcraft Centre readvertised the vacancy on September 3 to encourage more participants to compete for the position. The second interview was held on September 29 and Ngeema S Tshempo contested again. A former MoEA official,

Pema Rinzin, was selected. However, the chairperson of the board of Woodcraft Centre, Dasho Dr Sonam Tenzin, said that, after Sangay Wangdue withdrew from the post, the board had two options: to give it to Ngeema S Tshempo or to advertise the post again. “Since the company rule did not mention any of the two options, the board decided through a majority vote to readvertise the position hoping for more interested people to come forward,” he said.

Carving up the pay hike pie

The Pay Commission recommended a 77 percent to 40 percent pay hike for all civil servants, but the biggest beneficiaries of the hike will be non civil servants like the prime minister, members of parliament, cabinet ministers, heads of constitutional bodies and the members of the judiciary, many of whom will get more than 77 percent touching even 131 percent. A reliable source said that even government secretaries, who fall in the 77 percent category, are recommended a 1,200 percent increase in their allowances to match the top bracket. The Pay Commission’s recommendations had also originally proposed taxes on cars and luxury items to raise revenue apart from cost cutting. The government later decided to drop the tax proposal. The prime minister has been recommended the highest pay hike at a 131 percent and 35 percent allowance, taking his total salary from Nu 123,067 to Nu 241,000 per month. Following closely behind are the cabinet ministers, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Speaker of National Assembly, National Council Chairperson with a 67% pay hike and 30% allowance, taking up to Nu 177,667 a salary of Nu 114,733. Members of parliament were recommended a 100% salary hike and 51% allowance hike, taking their total salary (Nu 30,000 salary and Nu 23,333 allowance) from Nu 53,333 to Nu 95,333. The posts of chairpersons of constitutional bodies like ACC, Audit, ECB will be getting a 106% salary hike and 1,450% allowance hike taking their previous Nu 34,970 salary to a new Nu 85,500.

Coming to terms with America

In America you have to look up more often. That is if you are a male under 5 feet 5 inches. A thick-soled pair of hush puppies might take that frame to near average stature at home. Here, it does little to heighten physical presence. Being vertically challenged can be a bit of a strain on the neck when making conversation and on the legs as well when rushing to the bus stop; everyone seems to get there quicker although you are literally running. Visitors cannot help wondering whether this has something to do with the servings of food – they are enormous. You need both hands to hold a medium sized drink. So you stuff yourself in an attempt not to waste food as the brain works out the ngultrum-dollar conversion. This, according to some people, is one reason why the visitor from a developing country tends to gain the pounds, overtime. The food is very rich, best seen in widespread obesity. Ordering a meal can be a mind-boggling

experience. It's hard to catch the accent and understand what is being said and a desperate attempt on your side not to look like a fool. But it does not take long for the Bhutanese belly to crave for a 'real' meal – rice and chili. It drives you to walk the extra mile looking for that chili, which can give that familiar sensation from entry to exit. The urban American, in general, does not seem to spend a lot of time in the kitchen although most homes have spacious kitchens and bookstores sell numerous cookbooks. A lot of the food is readymade and many prefer to eat out on what Bhutanese may consider snack food.

Bhutan Post CEO post in limbo

This is still news to me," said Bhutan Post's chief executive officer select, Tseten Geltshen, responding to the Anti Corruption Commission's (ACC) revocation of his new appointment. Tseten Geltshen, former deputy secretary of the ministry of information and communication (MoIC), said that he did not receive any information about his appointment being "revoked" and was aware of it only after media coverage. "If my results were revoked, the government, which issued the order, should have informed me," he said, adding that he was appointed by the government and was to join office starting October 1 as per the office order. At the moment, he said he was in the process of handing over the administrative responsibilities in his former ministry and would be assuming his Bhutan Post office next week. The appointment had come under scrutiny after one of the unselected candidates alleged in the media that the selection procedure held last month was flawed. "As per the announcement, I applied for the post, was called for an interview and selected. Later I received an order from the government to join, starting October 1," said Tseten Geltshen. The chairman of Bhutan Post board of directors and officiating secretary of MoIC ministry, Phala Dorji, said that it would be an unfortunate development if what media printed was true. "Then the integrity of the board of six panels is being questioned," he said. "We're all responsible members drawn from various organisations and whatever we did was collective and not a one man show where we could expect foul play." He said that all members of the board were called and questioned by ACC and every member had responded accordingly but was not served with a letter or verbal instruction about the "revocation".

Lifestyle diseases double risk of kidney failure

Diabetes and hypertension will become two of the major causes of kidney failure in Bhutan within the next ten years, say doctors. n developing countries like Bhutan today, infection however is still the major cause of kidney damage. But the rise of non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension has doubled the risk. I"If hypertension and diabetes are not

tackled, they'll lead to kidney failure," said medical specialist and dialysis physician at the Thimphu referral hospital, Dr Tashi Wangdi. He said that about 60 percent of diabetics are likely to suffer from kidney failure. When the dialysis unit opened in Thimphu in 1998, there were only eight patients. , there are about 36 patients on dialysis. Dialysis is a process, which filters the blood of its toxic waste. Recognizing the attention kidney patients needed, the Thimphu referral hospital started a renal clinic about two weeks ago.

Strategic management for organisational success

A daylong executive seminar on "strategic management" conveyed the message that change is necessary and desirable in today's management system of public sectors. In an interactive session, where about 30 secretaries, dzongdags, directors and heads of corporate sectors participated, discussions focused on exploring strategies for better management. Dasho Dr Gado Tshering, who was the chief guest at the opening session, said that Bhutan was going through major changes in political, social, and economic dimensions, which demanded commensurate change in the system of management. "Strategic management should be combined with strategic leadership, which is crucial for the success of an organization or the government," he said. A participant pointed out that the government-controlled sectors were without defined roles and responsibilities. "It should be a team approach with well defined roles and responsibilities of individual post. It shouldn't be either a top-down or bottom-top approach to have an effective strategy," said a participant, Pema Wangdi from the Bhutan Development Financial Corporation. According to the resource speaker, Deborah Blackman, associate professor of the University of Canberra in Australia, strategic management is all about long-term achievement and the overall strategy needed to achieve this goal. When asked if political change can affect the management system in public sectors, she said that the political figures and the public sectors should negotiate power for better management. "Political figures may want to get re-elected and, sometimes, there will be promises where a public sector may not be able to fulfill. Also, who makes the decision might change," she said. The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) and the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) jointly, as a part of management development programme, organized the seminar.

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India

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- BJP warns against imposing President's Rule in Orissa
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Political front

BJP seeks apology from Amar Singh

BJP demanded an apology from Amar Singh for "questioning" the sacrifice of Delhi police officer Mohan Chand Sharma. "BJP strongly condemns the highly irresponsible, shameful and unfortunate statement of Amar Singh. For his highly deplorable conduct Amar Singh must apologies to the nation," party spokesperson Ravi Shanker Prasad said. He has not only raised doubts over the killing of terrorists in Jamia Nagar but has also questioned the supreme sacrifice of Mohan Chand Sharma, one of the most outstanding and courageous officer of Delhi Police, he added. "Singh has also tried to embolden the morale of terrorists and their patrons and demoralise the security forces," he alleged and claimed that the country is witnessing a disturbing trend of a sinister and sponsored campaign against security forces by misleading information.

BJP warns against imposing President's Rule in Orissa

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) warned the government against imposing President's Rule in Orissa, where communal riots during the past month and a half have claimed at least 35 lives.

BJP says it will oppose ban on Bajrang Dal

Accusing the Congress of comparing "nationalistic organisation" Bajrang Dal with SIMI, a senior BJP leader said the party will oppose if the Centre imposed a ban on the saffron outfit. "It is a matter of great sorrow that Congress-led Central Government has not been able to curb terrorism and take action against terrorist's organisations. But instead it has started working for imposing ban on the nationalistic organisation (Bajrang Dal)," Satya Pal Jain, party in-charge for Himachal Pradesh, said. He said that Bajrang Dal functions on the basis of "nationalistic view point and ideology and it can sacrifice its all for the sake of unity and integrity of the country". "Therefore, it will be an insult to the nationalistic ideology if an organisation like Bajrang Dal is banned," Jain said in a statement. He also took objection to the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) demanding a ban on Bajrang Dal, saying it has no power to make such recommendation. "It seems that the Minority commission has made this recommendation at the instance of Congress party and some other leaders, who are only concerned with their vote bank instead of the unity and integrity of the country," he alleged.

Advani demands revival of Pota

Exhorting party workers to burn the effigy of Aatankvad (terrorism) along with that of Ravana on Vijayadashami, the BJP leader, Mr L K Advani, today said the NDA would re-enact POTA if voted back to power in the next Lok Sabha elections. Mr Advani's comments came at his inaugural address to a seminar on terrorism, organised by Mumbai-based Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini institute of leadership training. Mr Advani questioned the "spineless and visionless" UPA government's commitment to fight terrorism. He said the countdown to the end of the government had begun. "The people of India will dethrone the UPA rulers whenever the next parliamentary elections are held," he declared.

Bangla Islamist ultra groups a threat: BJP

Bangladesh has become the breeding ground for young recruits of various Islamist terror groups, including the Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI), which is considered Al Qaeda's operating arm in South Asia, said Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Mr Rajnath Singh. "HuJI has floated a political party, Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) with permission from the caretaker government in Dhaka and consolidating its position in Bangladesh and boasts a membership of over 15,000 activists," Mr Singh told journalists."These developments could have serious implications on India's internal security as the perpetrators of terror attacks in India are trying to gain political legitimacy in Bangladesh."

Patil warns Orissa

Communal violence continued in Orissa, with two people being lynched by a mob in strife-torn Khandamal district, the Union Cabinet expressed grave concern over the situation in the state and home minister Mr Shivraj Patil shot off a strongly-worded letter to chief minister Mr Naveen Patnaik asking him to take effective measures and provide security for the minority community.

Alliance with Congress impossible

Hopes of a Congress-JD-S alliance against the ruling BJP in the forthcoming Lok Sabha and the by-elections appear to have died an early death thanks to the rivalry among the ranks in local Congress and the JD-S's first family, the Gowdas. Making his first pronouncement on alliance in Karnataka for the forthcoming Lok Sabha and by-elections in the state, Mr HD Kumaraswamy, former chief minister of Karnataka and the second in command of the JD-S in state, today said alliance with the Congress is impossible though the JD-S had expressed its willingness to join hands with the Congress to the representative of the Congress high command (Mr Prithivraj Chauhan) when the two met.

Orissa, Karnataka: Centre worried

Taking note of the continuing violence in Orissa and Karnataka, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today sought a detailed report from home minister Mr Shivraj Patil on the situation in these states. "The Cabinet took note of the latest situation prevailing in Orissa and Karnataka and the home minister was asked by the PM to apprise the Cabinet of the situation in its next meeting," Information and Broadcasting Minister Mr P R Dasmunsi said. He said serious concern was expressed on Orissa, particularly Kandhamal where "some organisations" were actively taking part in the violence and the home ministry has been asked to give an appraisal report at the earliest. "The situation is very grave. The government is quite concerned," he said.

NDA will conduct N-test if need arises'

The NDA, if it comes to power at the Centre, will not hesitate to conduct a nuclear test if need arises, senior BJP leader Mr Yashwant Sinha said."If the NDA comes to power it will not hesitate to conduct a nuclear test if such a need arises," Mr Sinha told reporters here.Asked whether the BJP would re-negotiate the Indo-US nuclear deal if it came to power after the next Lok Sabha elections, the former external affairs minister said it would certainly do so. "We will certainly re-negotiate it after going through the deal left by the UPA government. "The country is not going to get anything out of the nuclear deal. On the contrary, after its

operationalisation, the country loses the right to conduct nuclear tests," he said. He also criticised Union ministers Mr Lalu Prasad and Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, and Samajwadi Party chief Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav for openly extending support to the banned Simi outfit.

Karat asks UPA to issue specific directives to Orissa

CPI-M general secretary Mr Prakash Karat asked the UPA to invoke Article 355 and issue "specific directives" to the Orissa government to help end the continuing communal violence and to bring the culprits to book. Mr Karat accused the UPA for failing to check the anti-Christian violence. "It is not enough to issue advisories. The Centre should invoke Article 356 and issue directives to ensure that the culprits are brought to book", he told reporters. He said there is strong evidence of Bajrang Dal's role and demanded strong action against the Sangh Parivar under the Prevention of Unlawful Activities Act. He wondered why the Centre is not acting even after the Bajrang Dal has claimed responsibility. Mr Karat demanded a CBI probe into the rape of a nun and the killing of Christians. He said the situation in Orissa is serious as the violence against Christians is continuing unchecked. He alleged that the BJP and the Sangh Parivar were fomenting communal trouble across the country because of the coming elections. "They are trying to create communal polarisation in view of the elections. This is highly condemnable," he said

Ban on Bajrang Dal likely, says minister

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) backed Union minister of state for home Mr Shakeel Ahmad's statement to ban the right-wing Hindu outfit Bajrang Dal, while both the CPI-M and the Samajwadi Party described it as a "political gimmick". Speaking in Patna, Mr Ahmad pointed out that there was "little doubt that the Bajrang Dal is a terrorist outfit involved in creating terror", and said the government may ban it like it has the Simi. He said the government could ban the group if four to five state governments send reports making it clear that the outfit's activities lead to terror. BSP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Mr Shahid Siddiqui said: "Whether the BSP will send a report to ban the Bajrang Dal or not will be decided by (Uttar Pradesh) chief minister Mayawati. However, my opinion has been that all such organisations which spread terror in society, including Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Shiv Sena along with Simi, should be banned." However, the CPI-M decried Mr Ahmad's statement. "It is a ridiculous statement. This is nothing but an attempt by the Union government to escape responsibility and put the blame on others," said CPI-M Politburo member Mrs Brinda Karat. "This statement shows the utter hypocrisy of the government in dealing with the fanatic Hindu organisations. The Congress is aware of the terror activities of Bajrang Dal and other Hindu fanatic organisations," she said.

BJP, Left term N-deal defeat for India; Cong hails signing

Responding on predictable lines to President George W Bush's assent to the bill on Indo-US nuclear deal, the BJP and Left parties said that history will prove that the accord was a "defeat" for India with Washington remaining "silent" on nuclear testing. But the Congress hailed the signing of legislation into law by Bush, asserting that the Indian nuclear programme would be intact and future generations will not face power shortage.

Domestic situation:

19 killed in India riots

Clashes between ethnic groups in India's remote northeast have left at least 49 people dead in four days including 19 killed officials said. The fighting in Assam state began on Friday when a group of young ethnic Bodo men were attacked after patrolling their villages. Bodo leaders blamed relatively recent settlers, most of whom are Muslims, for sparking the clashes, said Assam Home Commissioner Subhash Das. But authorities said the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, a Bodo separatist group with a history of violence, were targeting Muslim settlers. More than 150 people have been injured in the violence and more than 100,000 have fled their homes in some 30 villages, Das said. "This is a clear case of ethnic cleansing by the NDFB," said Assam government spokesman. He said Bodo militants were coordinating attacks with violent mobs that were burning Muslims' homes. "Curfew is still in force with shoot-on-sight orders issued to the security forces. The situation is gradually returning to normal with no fresh incidents of violence reported," Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said. The clashes, between members of the Bodo tribal group and Muslim settlers originally from Bangladesh, have witnessed raids on numerous villages by groups armed with bows and poison-tipped arrows, spears and machetes.

Toll in Assam ethnic clashes mounts to 49

The toll in ethnic clashes in Assam has mounted to 49 and more than 100,000 people have been displaced, officials said adding that the situation was limping back to normal. "As many as 49 people have died since violence broke out on Friday, 15 of them in police firing, and the rest in incidents of clashes," Assam government spokesman and Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told journalists.

NHRC issues notice to K'taka govt on attack on Christians

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Friday issued a notice to Karnataka Government and asked it to submit a report on the violence against Christians in the state. The NHRC's notice came following a complaint filed by an Ahmebdabad-based NGO, Prashant -A Centre for Human Rights, Justice and Peace.The Commission asked the Chief Secretary to submit the report on the violence against Christians in Mangalore and surrounding areas.The NGO has alleged that the local administration seemed to be hand in glove with the perpetrators of violence against the Christian community, an NHRC release said.

Religious Violence In India

Religious violence is a growing problem in parts of India. According to the International Religious Freedom Report for 2008, there were organized communal attacks against minority

religious groups, particularly in states governed by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP. In the state of Orissa, governed by a coalition government that includes the BJP, Hindu extremists attacked Christian villagers and churches in the Kandhamal district over the Christmas holiday. Approximately, 100 churches and Christian institutions were damaged, and 700 Christian homes were destroyed causing villagers to flee to nearby forests. More violence followed in August after the murder of a prominent Hindu priest. Allegedly led by a militant youth wing of the Hindu nationalist Vishnu Hindu Parishad group, mobs torched churches and homes, displacing tens of thousands of Christians, many of whom are still in camps. Since then, anti-Christian attacks have spread in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala in the south, and to Uttar Pradesh in the north. Some of the worst cases have occurred in Karnataka, which earlier this year voted in the Hindu nationalist party, BJP. U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford said the violence appeared to be politically motivated, especially since some of it was carried out by police. Unfortunately, convictions over religious violence in India are rare. Last March, a United Nations freedom-of-religion Special Rapporteur warned that the scarcity of prosecutions and "political exploitation of communal tensions" put India at risk for more violence.The persecution of Christians in India tarnishes the long history of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Hindus. The U.S., said Ambassador Hanford, urges "all parties to refrain from violence and urge[s] government officials to protect religious freedom throughout India and thus, preserve India's long-standing tradition of religious tolerance."

Mobile tower attacked by Maoists again

Naxalites blasted the control room of a mobile phone tower at Devaniya village in Gaya , police said today. "More than 40 armed Maoists late last night blasted the control room of the mobile tower and set fire to the security guard's room and generator set of the private cellular phone service provider Airtel, apparently to block clues of their movements," Officer-in-Charge of Barachatti police station, Shashi Bhushan Sharma said.

Mumbai police claim breakthrough in blasts case

The Mumbai police claimed to have solved the mystery of two e-mails sent minutes before serial blasts that devastated Ahmedabad and Delhi in July and September respectively with the arrest of an IT software engineer who allegedly cracked the Wi-Fi connection of American Mr Ken Haywood (before Ahmedabad blasts) and of a Khalsa College, Matunga computer prior to the Delhi attacks.The Crime Branch claimed that the arrested suspects of Indian Mujahideen have also revealed their plot to plant explosives during the Navratri celebrations in Mumbai . "The conspiracy has been foiled," claimed Crime Branch joint CP Mr Rakesh Maria. The main hacker, Mohammed Mansoor Asgar Peerboy, 31, was reportedly working with a top MNC drawing a salary of Rs 19 lakh per annum. His partners are identified as Mohammed Shaikh, 24, and Asif Bashiruddin Shaikh, 22. So far 20 IM activists, including those involved in planting explosive devices in Ahmedabad, Delhi and Surat.

VHP: we don't have big presence in Kandhamal

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad charged that Christians in Orissa's Kandhamal district were setting fire to their own homes with an eye on compensation. At a press conference VHP central unit secretary Mohan Joshi said: "Christians are setting their own homes on fire to get good compensation [from the government]. There are rivalries among Christian groups. They are attacking and killing each other." Mr. Joshi complained that recently some "one thousand innocent Hindu tribals and members of Hindu organisations have been arrested and mala fide cases registered against some 4,000 persons." To a question, he said the VHP did not have a large presence in Kandhamal, engulfed in violence for the last six weeks. "Only a few conveners, but no units of the VHP function in Kandhamal," he said, contrary to the assertion by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh functionaries that the VHP has a large presence in the area where it has been "working and doing social service."

Economic Front:

India's Tata signs deal to move cheap car plant

Tata chairman Ratan Tata signed an agreement on Tuesday to move the troubled Nano cheap car project to the western Indian state of Gujarat. The move came after Tata Motors was forced to abandon its factory in communist-run West Bengal due to violent protests by evicted farmers and activists. Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, a Hindu nationalist politician who has promoted his state as a business-friendly destination, wooed the project with an offer of 1,000 acres (440 hectares) and a promise of no labour strikes.

Sensex hits two-year low

The key benchmark indices made some recovery after it hit a new intraday low in mid-afternoon trade. The BSE Sensex was down 142.92 points. The BSE Sensex and the S&P CNX Nifty both hit two-year lows on Tuesday. This was in contrast to an initial surge that was triggered by liquidity boosting measures by regulators. Volatility was high. Sterlite Industries fell close to 10 per cent while Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Larsen & Toubro fell more than 6 per cent each. Global financial sector jitteres weighed on the domestic bourses as European stocks fell on reports the UK government may be forced to provide funding for Royal Bank of Scotland. The domestic market ingnored reports that Finance Minister P Chidambaram expects 8 per cent GDP growth in the current financial year notwithstanding the global financial crises. Reliance Industries edged higher. Capital goods and IT stocks declined. The market breadth was negative in contrast to a strong breadth earlier in the day.

Lehman Brothers' India ops saved from economic meltdown

A Japanese financial services outfit has agreed to purchase Lehman Brothers' India-based operational support businesses, rescuing roughly 3,000 people - including 1,200 IT professionals from the worldwide economic meltdown. The Tokyo-headquartered Nomura Holdings will acquire Lehman Brothers Services India Private Limited, Lehman Brothers Financial Services (India) Private Limited, and Lehman Brothers Structured Finance Services Private Limited - three companies set up in Powai, Mumbai in 2005. Last month, Nomura said it would acquire Lehman Brothers' Asia Pacific franchise as well as its Europe and Middle East investment banking and

equities businesses. The Asia-Pacific deal closed last week and the Europe-Middle East will be finalized on October 13.

India hopes to attract over $4bln in green energy

India is hoping to attract investments of more than $4 billion in renewable energy over the next 5-7 years, as it prepares to unveil a new biofuels policy within a month, renewable energy Minister Vilas Muttemwar said. Domestic and foreign companies such as India's Tata group and Reliance Industries as well as state-run utilities are among hundreds of companies vying for a stake in India's emerging green energy sector. Another 150 companies are also keen to set up biofuel processing plants, Muttemwar told Reuters in an interview. "A lot of scope is there in the coming days for renewable energy... According to our information, nearly 200 billion rupees ($4.3 billion) is the investment we are expecting in five to seven years," he said during Reuters Global Environment Summit. The investments span solar, hydro, wind and biofuel energy. India aims to generate 25,000 megawatts of power from renewable energy over the next four years, more than double the current generation level of 12,000 MW. Only three percent of India's total power mix is now from renewable, and developing this sector is at the centre of India's national plan on climate change which does not commit to any emission targets. In spite of its pledge to clean technology, pollution-spewing coal remains the backbone of India's power sector accounting for about 60 percent of generation with the government planning to add about 70,000 MW in the next five years

India's Economic Growth Will Rebound to 9%, Chidambaram Says

India's economic growth is likely to rebound to 9 percent in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010, Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram said. The economy may expand by more than 8 percent in the current fiscal year, Chidambaram said in New Delhi. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last week said India's growth prospects may be dampened by a global economic slowdown and the rise in prices of oil and other commodities. The Reserve Bank of India expects the $1.2 trillion economy to expand 8 percent in the 12 months ending March, the slowest pace in four years. India's economy grew 7.9 percent in the three months to June 30 from a year earlier, the weakest pace since the last quarter of 2004. ``The message is that we will be vigilant and agile," Chidambaram said. ``We must be confident that our future is bright, there is nothing to fear."

Mamata pulled the trigger, says Ratan

Tata Sons chairman Mr Ratan Tata lashed out at the Trinamul Congress chief Miss Mamata Banerjee holding her solely responsible for pulling out the company's small car project from Singur. “Miss Banerjee has pulled the trigger and we had no other choice but to pull out of West Bengal,” a visibly anguished Mr Tata told reporters at a press conference this evening.

Sensex down 529 points

It was dreadful day for the markets. Nifty closed below it psychological 3,850 mark and during the day Sensex slipped below 12,500. Heavy sell off was seen in largecap stocks. All sectoral indices closed negative. The BSE metal was the worst performer of the day; it lost over seven

per cent. Massive selling was seen in oil & gas, bank, IT, realty, capital goods and power stocks. The BSE midcap and smallcap indices fell over two per cent each. The Sensex closed down 529.35 points or 4.05% at 12,526.32, and the Nifty ended 132.45 points or 3.35% down at 3,818.30. Market breadth was negative, about 852 shares have advanced, 2,124 shares have declined, and 205 shares are unchanged. Mr Sandeep Bhatia of Kotak Institutional Equities feels the bailout package would not lead to a substantial rally in the market as the package does not address other fundamental problems. He said the fundamentals of India were sounder than other economies but expects the Indian markets to trend lower for the next two to three months. He fears the Sensex may hit sub-12,000 levels if there are negative surprises and sees a 1,000 point correction due to global mayhem. “The markets will react to near term flows and trend low,” During this week Sensex and Nifty lost 4.7% and 4.4% respectively. Index heavyweight Reliance has touched a 52-week low of Rs 1,747.25, in this week the stock has lost 11%. Top losers on the Sensex were ICICI Bank, Sterlite Ind and Reliance Industries.

Steel imports likely to rise

India may continue to be a net importer of steel in the current fiscal following the huge demand supply mismatch, steel minister, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan said. “Whereas the demand for steel continues to be at around 11.2 per cent, the production growth in the first half of the year has been only 5.2 per cent,” Paswan told reporters at the 22nd Steel Consumer Council meeting here. During the past six months, India's steel imports have shot up by 50 per cent to about three million tons as compared to the corresponding period in the last fiscal. In 2007-08, the country imported about six million tons of steel to meet the growing requirement of the alloy. Mr Paswan said the demand for steel in India is expected to reach 109 million tons by 2012-13 whereas the government has envisaged a total production of 124 million tons, excluding the proposed greenfield projects of Posco and ArcelorMittal.

Foreign exchange reserves fall

Foreign exchange reserves with Reserve Bank of India depleted by about $153 million for the week ended 26 September mainly on account of dollar-selling by the central bank to facilitate exporters' demands. The reserves, according to the RBI's weekly statistical supplement, stood at $292 billion. The fall has been due to a dip in the foreign currency assets consisting of dollars, euro, pound and yen by around $ 159 million. However, the quantum of gold and SDR (Special Drawing Right) with IMF ~ remained unchanged. In fact reserves with IMF, the supplement noted, grew by $9 million.However, the overall decline in forex reserves since end-March this year has been $18 billion. Dollar selling also affected the rupee position in the system since dollars have been absorbed at the cost of rupee.

India top outsourcing destination: Study

India, home to six of the world's top eight outsourcing hubs, continues to be a major global IT and BPO outsourcing destination amid a determined bid by the neighbouring China to give it a tough competition in the field, according to a new study. Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune are the six Indian cities in the list of top eight outsourcing cities of the world, according to a study by Global Services, the media platform for global IT outsourcing and BPO industry and Tholons, a global investment advisory firm.

India Rupee Falls Past 48 per Dollar on Capital-Outflow Concern

India's rupee fell past 48 per dollar for the first time in more than five years on concern a global stock rout will spur investors to take money out of local shares. The currency declined for a third day after the Dow Jones Industrial Average closed below 10,000 yesterday for the first time since October 2004. Japan's Nikkei 225 Stock Average lost 2.1 percent today, after earlier sliding below 10,000 for the first time since 2003. India's benchmark share index fell to a two-year low. ``The rupee will weaken further as investors continue to pull out of the equity market," said Krishnamurthy Harihar, a treasurer at Development Credit Bank Ltd. in Mumbai. ``The turmoil across global markets is going to affect sentiment on the local currency." The rupee fell as much as 0.4 percent to 48.02 per dollar, the lowest since January 2003, before trading at 47.97 as of 11:40 a.m. in Mumbai, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

India May Allow More Overseas Investment as Rupee at 6-Year Low

India may allow more overseas investments in corporate and government bonds and ease overseas borrowing rules for local companies to boost dollar inflows and shore up the rupee from a six-year low. The finance ministry is considering a proposal to raise the limit on holdings of government bonds by overseas investors from $5 billion and that on corporate bonds from $3 billion, said an official who did not want to be named.

Reduced Cash

The Reserve Bank of India on Oct. 6 reduced the cash reserve ratio to 8.5 percent from 9 percent effective Oct. 11 to inject 200 billion rupees ($4.2 billion) into the financial system. On the same day, the capital-markets regulator lifted curbs on overseas investors imposed a year ago by removing a requirement that forced investors to register in India before buying shares. The Reserve Bank may cut the amount of cash banks need to set aside as reserves again if the financial crisis triggered by the collapse of lenders in the U.S. and Europe deepens, Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and JPMorgan Chase & Co. said

India most vulnerable in face of external uncertainties: Citigroup

Global financial giant Citigroup has ranked India as the second most vulnerable Asian economy after Thailand, while terming dragon economy China as the most resilient to external uncertainties."Citi's Vulnerability Index points to China and Taiwan as the most resilient and

India and Thailand as the most vulnerable in the face of external uncertainties," it said in a report called Asia Macro Views.The report said, external flows risks are important for macroeconomic stability. Further intensification of the US financial crisis and tightening of global liquidity would hit the economies including India the most.At the moment, however, the most relevant risks for Asian economies and markets are liquidity problems, it said.

Geo-strategic developments:

Rice leaves US-India nuclear deal unsigned

Last-minute administrative hitches forced Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state, to leave New Delhi at the weekend without signing the US-India nuclear deal to end more than three decades of isolation for India's nuclear programme. Ms Rice's visit, on the heels of US Senate approval of the civil nuclear deal last week, had been widely billed as concluding the agreement after three years of tough negotiations. Opposition parties in India had even intended to make Saturday a day of mourning for what they perceive to be India's capitulation to the US. Ms Rice was at pains to stress that failure to ink the deal was not a sign it might yet unravel. "I don't want anyone to think we have open issues. We don't have open issues," she said after talks with Pranab Mukherjee, India's minister for external affairs, on Saturday. Rather she blamed administrative delays in the US at a time when Congressional attention was focused on the $700bn (€507bn, £394bn) bail-out to stem the country's financial crisis. An opportunity last month for a signing by India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and US president George W. Bush in Washington passed without Congressional approval.

US uncertain when N-deal will be inked with India

Ahead of President George W Bush signing the Indo-US civil nuclear deal into law, the US on Monday said it was still uncertain as to when the two countries would ink the landmark accord. Maintaining that he is not aware as to when exactly the US-India Civilian Nuclear Agreement is going to be formally inked, the State Department's deputy spokesman, Robert Wood, said that the important thing is that the deal has been finalised and what remains now are just administrative matters.

"Changes in 123 agreement nullify Manmohan's promises"

The former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), P.K. Iyengar, has said the latest modifications made in the 123 agreement by the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate nullified the promises made by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the nuclear agreement between India and the U.S. These modifications have also neutralised the demands/observations of AEC Chairman Anil Kakodkar that India had been assured of uninterrupted fuel supply in the 123 agreement, that India had a right to find alternative suppliers in case the supply was disrupted and that the Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver to India should be clean and unconditional, Dr. Iyengar said in an interview. "The entire 123 agreement is orchestrated to bind India to a status of a non-nuclear weapon country and surrendering its

right to reprocess [the spent fuel] even under the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguards," he said.

Chandrayaan all set for lift-off

After repeated delays, India's first unmanned mission to the Moon ~ Chandrayaan-1 ~ will be launched on 22 October from the spaceport at Sriharikota, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) sources said. The sources said, weather conditions permitting, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C11) carrying Chandrayaan-1 will blast off at 6.20 AM. The Rs 386-crore lunar mission was cleared by the government five years back but the historic launch faced several delays. The space odyssey moved one more step closer to fruition when the satellite was transported from here to Sriharikota in a special vehicle last week and has since reached the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in the coastal town, about 100 km from Chennai. The spacecraft is expected to be mated with ISRO's work-horse launcher, PSLV-C11 later this week, the sources said. The spacecraft will carry 11 payloads ~ five from India and six from the US, Europe and Bulgaria. It would orbit the moon at an altitude of 100 km mapping the topography and the mineralogical content of the lunar soil.Chandrayaan-1 would also carry a Moon Impact Probe payload for demonstrating the technology needed towards landing on the Moon's surface. India believes the lunar mission is a step towards its quest for exploration of outer space and inter-planetary missions.

Bush to sign landmark US-India nuclear legislation

President Bush plans to sign into law on Wednesday a bill allowing civilian U.S. nuclear trade with India.The signing culminates three years of work by the Bush administration to allow U.S. businesses to begin selling nuclear fuel, technology and reactors to India in exchange for safeguards and U.N. inspections at India's civilian, but not military, nuclear plants. Critics say such trade could spur a nuclear arms race in South Asia. The White House has said the bilateral nuclear deal itself was expected to be signed shortly after Bush signs the legislation approving it.

Kashmir

Curfew in Valley, no separatist protest

Barring some minor incidents, curfew remained enforced in the Kashmir Valley for the second day with police and paramilitary forces deployed in large numbers to thwart any attempt by separatist groups to hold a protest rally in Lal Chowk area here. The day passed off peacefully, which also saw a rare move by people of three areas in south Kashmir of approaching the district administration and asking for removal of curfew against a written assurance provided by them?

Director General of Police Mr Kuldeep Khoda told PTI that there was no report of any untoward

incident from any part of the Valley where curfew had been imposed. “We are constantly monitoring the situation and a necessary decision on easing the restriction will be taken at an appropriate time,” he said.However, official sources said a crowd had gathered in Old Baramulla late last night and this morning and shouted slogans against the state administration. Today, the crowd thrashed one person identified as Awaiz Lone for carrying a pistol during a procession and handed him over to police.Later, he turned out to be an army informer and the pistol had been issued to him for his self-protection. Police will take necessary legal action, a senior official said.

New terror devices in Kashmir Valley

Terrorists operating in Kashmir are devising new tools to spread terror in the Valley. The latest addition in their terror tactics is the use of explosives in household utensils. The Army in North Kashmir area of Bandipore, situated close to the Line of Control, has recovered a pressure cooker fitted with improvised explosive device (IED), weighing about four kilograms which was to be used as an explosive by the terrorists. Senior Army officers posted in the area said that the terrorists intended to plant this pressure cooker in a civilian area and when picked up by an innocent villager ~ oblivious of the fact that it was fitted with an IED ~ they would have blown it off resulting in heavy casualties. “The powerful pressure cooker fitted with an IED, was recovered by the troops of 52 Rashtriya Rifle along with security task forces Sopore and 179 battalion CRPF, when they got hold of a worker named Jahagir Ahmed Malla while carrying out routine check at Karinkshiwan. Malla's apprehension led to the recovery of pressure cooker IED and also four UGBL grenades,” said the officers. Meanwhile, the troops also killed two LeT terrorists at village Darawani in Shupiyan district.

Malik held, curfew in Valley

Mohammad Yasin Malik, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was arrested and indefinite curfew imposed across the Kashmir Valley ahead of the proposed separatist march tomorrow to city centre Lal Chowk. "Malik was arrested from his Maisuma residence in the city," JKLF sources said here. Malik had visited Lal Chowk yesterday along with half a dozen supporters to "give final touches to the proposed march," the sources said. Vehicles with loudspeakers were seen in all 10 districts of the Valley at the crack of dawn, announcing that curfew was being imposed and that people should remain indoors. "Those defying curfew restrictions would be dealt with sternly," the announcement ahead of the march to Lal Chowk called for tomorrow by the hardline and moderate factions of the Hurriyat said. "Restrictions under Section 144 of the CrPc (Criminal Procedure Code) would remain in force till further orders throughout the Valley from dawn today," Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police Mr Kuldeep Khoda told IANS. An assembly of five or more people is deemed as unlawful under the orders. Meanwhile, senior hardline separatist leader and chairman of the breakaway Hurriyat group Syed Ali Geelani, who complained of severe chest

pain Saturday evening, was shifted to the Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), the state's premier medical facility, on the advice of doctors attending on him. The joint co-ordination committee of the hardline and moderate factions of the Hurriyat had Friday called for "a massive public march to Lal Chowk on 6 October ".The committee had said that the march "would remain totally peaceful and if the authorities imposed curfew, people would try and defy it without resorting to violence or raising any provocative slogans".Authorities have made elaborate security arrangements with police and paramilitary CRPF personnel deployed in all 10 districts of the Valley. All roads, lanes and bylanes leading to city centre Lal Chowk have been sealed to prevent the entry of separatist leaders. Meanwhile, one of the most wanted top commanders of the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) Abrar Ahmad alias Abu Ubaid ~ was killed in the hinterland of Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district late last night, police said today.

Govt, EC undecided on poll schedule in J&K

With the general law and order situation and the security scene still fluid in Jammu and Kashmir coupled with the extreme reluctance of major regional political parties like the National Conference and PDP for a scheduled poll in the sensitive border state, the government and the Election Commission are still undecided on the issue. Highly placed sources in the Commission said that the EC is facing “a difficult situation” wherein it is not in a position to say that the elections will be held in the state as in late October or early November as originally planned. The governor’s rule was imposed on July 10 in the state after the Congress-led Azad government resigned consequent to the withdrawal of support by coalition partner PDP over the Amarnath shrine land row issue. Even if the elections were not held on time to elect the new House by November 20, authorities still have enough time to hold the polls to elect the new Assembly before January 10 when the governor’s rule ends. The Election Commission held a meeting with major political parties, both national and regional, in September to ascertain their views. Except BJP and the Left, practically all others are not willing for a poll in October-November. The Congress, facing a tough turf in the state on account of the land row and subsequent violence, has tactfully made it known that it would go by “whatever decision the Election Commission takes.” While BJP and the Left parties demanded that elections be held on schedule by November end, the NCP and Panthers Party wanted delimitation to be done first before finalising the date. Congress, however, chose to leave it to the EC to decide the timing. The National Conference and PDP opposed holding of Assembly polls later this year claiming that the situation in the state after widespread violence in the wake of the Amarnath issue was not conducive for the democratic exercise. The National Conference (NC) holds the view that the situation is not conducive for holding assembly elections and a low voter turnout will not serve any purpose. “The situation is not conducive for polls. There is a deep polarisation of voters in Jammu and the feeling of alienation is very strong in the valley,” according to NC president Omar Abdullah.

'Pakistan's shift in Kashmir policy is alarming' JKLL

People of Kashmir view with scepticism a major shift in Pakistan's foreign policy outlined by President of Pakistan Mr. Asif Ali Zardari in a recent interview to an American news paper. His declaration that India has never been a threat to Pakistan is a surprise for every Pakistani. The statement of support by Palestinian president in favour of the Indian democracy speaks of the huge failure of Pakistan's foreign policy and people of Kashmir view it as a treason to the on going movement for their right of Self determination. American Presidents speech yesterday seems to be the last of the events in the aforementioned sequence. The Kashmiri leadership now needs to review its strategies for their movement for right of self determination this was stated by Dr Misfar Hassan former Secretary General Jammu Kashmir Liberation League in a statement. He said the timing and sequence of events regarding the favourable policy announced by President of Pakistan seems to be one of the sequences of events that indicates the recent change in Pakistan's Foreign policy recently dictated to Mr Zardari in by the American administration. He said the on going financial difficulties faced by American and Pakistani government have been made an excuse for a shift in the policy. People of Kashmir realise and understand the difficulties faced by the present government of Pakistan but that does not mean that the people of Kashmir would compromise on their in alienable right of self determination. He said its time for the people of Pakistan to look into the matters and make such people accountable who are trying to make Pakistan a subordinate state to India. Whole commenting on a recent statement by the Palestinian president Mr Makhmoud Abbas he said it is a shame for the people of Palestine who have always received support from the people of Kashmir for their freedom struggle and now their stooge president who acquired power through a conspiracy supported by International political forces is making favourable statement for a country where minorities do not have any rights be it Sikhs, Christians or Muslims. In this regards he termed it another failure of the foreign policy of Pakistan who has lost all international political support for the people of Kashmir.

Zardari effigy burnt

Defying curfew, protesters burnt Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in effigy, in Baramulla town of Jammu and Kashmir for terming militants operating in the state as terrorists. More than 400 protesters defied curfew, gathered in Baramulla town and raised slogans against President Zardari for his remarks.

Social front

Bengal: 27 infants dead in 7 days

Two more newborns died at the Baharampore sub-divisional hospital in Murshidabad district taking the number of infants who have died in the district in a week to 27. Ten of them died over the weekend. Hospital staff said Monday's deaths were normal, but preliminary inquiry identified diarrhoea, acute pneumonia, septicaemia and malnutrition as the causes of deaths reported at the Baharampur hospital on Sunday. Hospital sources said the infants, aged between a month and 3

years, succumbed to breathing problem arising out of pneumonia. In most cases, it was found that the parents ignored early symptoms of cough and cold the infants had shown, Samanta said. “Once the festive season was over, they started consulting doctors at their health centres, but it was too late. The virus had spread, making it difficult to save the babies.” Locals have complained of poor healthcare system in the district and some have even accused the doctors and nurses of negligence and blamed the deaths on them.

Foreign Relations

Pakistan president says India never a threat

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari said in an interview that arch-enemy India had never been a threat to his country and that Islamic militant groups in Indian-controlled Kashmir were terrorists. His views on India appear to run counter to that of Pakistan’s powerful military, which has regarded its nuclear-armed neighbor as an existential threat since the creation of the two countries after independence in 1947. Asked if he would consider a free-trade pact with India, he said: for one, and our democratic government is not scared of Indian influence abroad

India criticises Sri Lanka's Tamil offensive

India criticised Sri Lanka in a rare intervention into the island's internal affairs, saying civilian deaths during a military offensive against Tamil rebels were a cause of grave concern. India's National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan summoned Sri Lanka's representative in New Delhi to convey strong reservations about the intensifying military onslaught against Tamil separatists, officials said. The 80 million population of India's southern Tamil Nadu state share cultural and emotional links with minority Tamils in Sri Lanka.Narayanan said that "the escalation of hostilities in the north and the resultant fall out was leading to a great deal of concern in India," an Indian foreign ministry statement said. Sri Lanka must "act with greater restraint and address the growing feeling of insecurity among the minority community," it said India directly intervened in the Sri Lankan conflict in 1987 by sending troops to supervise a bilateral peace pact, but the soldiers ended up fighting Tamil Tigers. New Delhi withdrew its troops three years later after losing 1,200 soldiers. Since then, India has maintained a hands-off policy towards Sri Lanka.

India praises Zardari for policy shift on Kashmir 'terrorists'

India hailed the branding of militants in Kashmir as "terrorists" by Pakistan's president as a breakthrough for the two nuclear-armed neighbours. Asif Ali Zardari's remarks are a shift from a long standing Pakistani policy of extending "moral and diplomatic support" to insurgents in the disputed, Muslim majority territory. They were made shortly before India locked down Kashmir under a curfew to prevent separatists staging a pro-independence rally this week. Anand Sharma, India's minister for external affairs said that, after years of differences, Pakistan had finally swung in line with India's view of the security challenges in the region. “India had always raised the matter of cross-border terrorism in international fora and Zardari's statement confirms this", Mr Sharma said.India's main opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party, said Mr Zardari's statement marked a new chapter in relations with Pakistan.

Pak. accuses India of 'stealing' river water

Accusing India of having "stolen" its share of Chenab river water, Pakistan threatened to seek arbitration by neutral experts over it even as the two countries prepared to discuss the issue later this month. "India should concede violations of the Indus Waters Treaty. If they do not accept the violations in the Treaty, then it would be a big setback to Treaty (and give the impression) that India is not serious about implementing the Treaty," Indus Water Commissioner Jamaat Ali Shah told. He said Pakistan has documentary evidence that its due share of water has been "stolen" from the Chenab River. India should release Pakistan's share of river waters and if it is not done, Pakistan will have the option to take the issue to the court of arbitration or to neutral experts, Shah said.

Abbas in Delhi, says India can play a role in West Asia peace process

The President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, arrived here on a four-day visit to India. The highlight of his visit will be the laying of the foundation stone of the Embassy of Palestine in Delhi. As sources in South Block point out, the gifting of the Embassy to the people of Palestine is also aimed at pacifying the countries of West Asia about India's continued commitment to its friendship with the Muslim world. The minister of external affairs, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, is going to visit Iran soon. Another indication of India's aim to assure West Asia that despite the recent warmth in relations with the USA, India values its relationship with West Asia. In a continued show of support for the PNA, India is planning to build Jawaharlal Nehru senior secondary school in the West Bank town of Abu Dis, set up a cardiac surgery centre and an IT park in Gaza and build the Prime Minister's office in Ram Allah as part of a $15 million aid package to the PNA. This is President Abbas's second visit to India since the UPA government came to power. Describing Indian democracy a "role model" for the Palestinian people, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas has said the country can play an important role in West Asia's peace process. Urging India to actively engage in the process, he said the "security and stability of our region directly affects the stability of their region".

Now, a global tourist resort at Wagah-Attari border

A weekend visit to the famed Attari -Wagah international border near Amritsar is likely to be more alluring -- thanks to a new realm in the Indo-Pak relationship that has prompted setting up of a global tourist resort there. The initiative was taken by India in what seems to be a major step in the confidence building measures between the two neighbours, who have also decided to launch cross-border trade through Jammu and Kashmir. Inaugurating the resort, Minister for Tourism and Culture Ambika Soni said the flow of tourists from across the border would help in promoting peace between the two nations. The tourist complex, earlier known as Neem Chameli, has a built-up area of about 10,000 sq ft and is spread over 1.75 acres of land with facilities for restaurants, bar, shops and rooms for domestic as well as foreign tourists and in

particular visitors from Pakistan. Soni said tourism has vast potential for employment generation and the Institute of Hotel Management set up in the area will provide opportunities for youth.

PM announces $20m aid for Palestine

In the latest show of solidarity to the Palestinian cause, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh today announced $20 million assistance to the Palestine National Authority. The Prime Minister was speaking at the inauguration of the Palestine embassy in the capital in the presence of visiting PNA President, Mahmoud Abbas. Dr Singh announced an assistance of $10 million (approximately Rs 40 crore) to the Palestinian Authority as budgetary support to help it meet its immediate needs. India will also give $10 million as assistance for developmental projects, he said.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

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BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

SOUTH & EAST ASIA and GCC & Fertile Crescent

Nadia Tasleem

Weekly Report from 11 October to 17 October 2008

Presentation: 22 October 2008

The report is comprised of three parts. First part is based on the review of news items focusing on political, economic, social and geo-strategic developments in various regions namely; South Asia, East Asia, GCC and Fertile Crescent from 11 October to 17 October as have been collected by interns; while second part of the report is based on review of four articles, in context of East Asia. Third part however gives brief description of various research institutes working in East Asia or focusing on the respective region.

PART I

Summary

South Asia:

Political Front:

To begin with ***Bangladesh*** political situation is still vague and uncertain. AL on one hand held talks with government to resolve political stalemate by sorting out solutions of key issues of contention. On the other hand AL and BNP have warned government to launch joint movement against CTR in order to exert pressure on it to end cases against leaders of both parties and to lift emergency prior to elections. Meanwhile Government has filed another charge sheet against BNP leader Khaleda Zia; this can further deteriorate political situation. In ***Srilanka*** confrontation between the government and LTTE is still going on. In this regard Sri Lankan Air force yesterday targeted the LTTE Peace Secretariat and the Political Head Office in Kilinochci. Meanwhile LTTE

also launched suicide attack in Anuradhapura which killed 27 and injured more than 80 people; being strongly blamed by the US and the UN. In case of ***Nepal*** National Congress seems to be dissatisfied with ruling regime hence strongly blamed it for its treatment of victims of conflict who had launched a peaceful sit-in protest against government. Meanwhile NC has also announced its intention to launch a nation wide campaign to reinvigorate its position. Koirala has also asked his party members to maintain discipline in order to acquire former position. On the other hand government seems busy in integrating Army. ***Myanmar's*** military junta is still being blamed for increasing suppression against pro-democracy activists prior to elections in 2010.

India:

As far as Indian ***political situation*** is concerned BJP kept on criticizing UPA government for its failure to curb violence, signing of Indo-US nuclear deal and its inability to give firm response to China's territorial claim over the land of Arunanchal Pradesh. Meanwhile CPI (M) has also announced its objective to defeat Congress and reject BJP in upcoming elections. CPI (M) reiterated its demand to ban Bajrang Dal for its involvement in terrorist activities. Government, on the other hand, held meeting of National Integration Council (NIC) headed by PM, in order to sort out ways to counter terrorism. Opposition parties also attended the meeting and kept on accusing government for the spurt in violence. Apart from opposition by BJP and CPI (M), government has got serious threats by political parties of Tamil Nadu, asking government to stop assisting Srilankan regime otherwise they would quit Parliament. In Uttar Pradesh BSP has initiated various policies to make Muslims happy in the region. It is commonly assumed that her policies intend to get Muslims' vote in elections.

Moving towards ***domestic violence***; government imposed curfew in three districts of Andhra Pradesh in order to end communal violence over there that led to the death of 9 persons leaving many others injured. Meanwhile Leftists called bandh against communal violence in Orissa. In Kashmir visit of PM led to fresh clashes killing 1 person while leaving 18 injured. Meanwhile EC has announced to hold elections in the valley of Jammu & Kashmir as soon as possible.

In terms of ***Indo-US nuclear deal***, Indian external affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, finally signed 123 civil nuclear pact last week. Now India is looking forward to make such deals with countries like France and Russia; meanwhile South Africa has also offered to sell uranium to India.

Geo-strategic Front:

Canadian government has issued an agreement for the appointment of its High Commissioner in ***Srilanka***. News regarding ***Burmese-Bangla*** Hydro-power plant remained in focus. Moving

towards ***India***, government has expressed serious concerns about political situation in Srilanka, adversely effecting lives of common people. Meanwhile India has asked Pakistan to avoid violations of border in order to develop cordial ties; being necessary for both countries.

Social Front:

Shortage of gas supply to the South-Western region of ***Bangladesh*** has led to failure of industrialization in the region. ***Srilankan*** government seems busy in supplying food to civilians in LTTE controlled areas. In case of ***Maldives***, authorities have ordered to destroy more than 20,000 bottles of Dutch Lady Milk manufactured in China in the wake of detection of melamine in Chinese milk products which has set off a global food safety scare. Meanwhile in a historic move towards greater freedom of expression and dissemination of information, the People's Majlis has started live broadcast of its meetings. The decision followed Majlis signing an agreement with two private broadcasters DhiFM and Atoll TV. As far as ***Myanmar*** is concerned the most significant development at social front is list of recommendations being made by UN to end human rights violation in Myanmar. In ***India*** growing number of women heart patients has become a source of concern for health units. Meanwhile growing number of hungry people, as has been stated to be 200 million in a report; is yet another serious issue for the government.

Economic Front:

Government of ***Bangladesh*** has promised to reduce oil prices with decline in the prices globally. Meanwhile government is taking initiatives to make Bangladesh a commerce friendly country. Besides that remittances in Bangladesh have overtaken the previous record. Permanent Representative of ***Nepal*** to the United Nations Madhu Raman Acharya has called upon the international community to undertake a comprehensive approach to financing development in the developing countries, while talking at UNGA forum. ***Myanmar*** has agreed to export gas to Bangladesh if it finds new gas reserves. In ***India*** number of tourists has increased further. However value of rupee has decreased by 43 paisa and stock exchange was down by 674 points. Government therefore seems to be keen to take various measures to avoid further economic losses. One step would be to increase inflow of foreign capital. Besides that it has asked EU, G-8 and IMF to help her to come out of ongoing economic crisis that is expected to affect Indian GDP.

East Asia:

Political Front:

To begin with ***Indonesia*** police arrested five Papuans for raising separatist flag in the province of Papua. In ***Malaysia*** opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim has further delayed his plan to topple Abdullah Badawi's regime amidst ongoing economic crisis; therefore asked government to cooperate with opposition parties in order to revise economic policies to keep economy growing. PM also asked all party leaders to play their role in bringing reforms in various fields. ***Thai*** PM has started thinking in terms of resignation amidst political crisis being faced by the country. Army also pressurized government to take immediate steps to end chaos. Meanwhile government has announced to extend emergency in Southern region for another three months. Opposition groups in the ***Philippines*** filed an impeachment complaint against President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, but admitted they did not have the numbers in Congress to make it stick. Arroyo has fended off three impeachment complaints in each of the past three years with her domination of the House of Representatives. Meanwhile 13 Muslims have been killed in a two-day military offensive launched in Mindanao.

Geo-strategic Front:

Indonesian President gave suggestion to put the issue of border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia onto the agenda of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Beijing; while expressing positive hopes regarding its peaceful end. ***Malaysia*** has announced to sign labor pact with India within next few months. ***Thai-Cambodian*** border issue remained significant as both came at the verge of war due to recent exchange of fire at borderline, compelling Cambodian PM to warn Thailand of escalation of conflict. It led Thai Pm to pull back his troops from two flash points along the border. Talks have failed to resolve this issue till now yet efforts are being made to settle it by peaceful means. UN expressed grave concerns about Thai-Cambodian recent clashes. ***Singapore*** has expressed serious concerns regarding exchange of fire at Thai-Cambodian border. Inspectors of ***Vietnam*** and Egypt have agreed to increase the exchange of experiences and information to reinforce the fight against crimes. Vietnam also reiterated its support to the UN and the international community in their efforts to bring long lasting peace in Afghanistan.

Social Front:

At ***Indonesian*** social front, two significant developments include ban on recruitment of Indonesian maids in Bahrain by Embassy of Indonesia in the Kingdom and a report showing 70% of families in East Timor lack proper food. A recent survey conducted by the National Family Council indicates that more ***Singaporeans*** now give top priority to family. The ***Philippines*** government, the UN and the private sectors have jointly sent an emergency assistance of P89.337 million to the people of central Mindanao amidst renewed violence between government forces and rebels over there. USAID has provided over 2.6 million USD to extend two projects that aim to assist people with disabilities throughout ***Vietnamese*** society. Moving

towards ***Laos***, Red Cross has donated 120 tonnes of rice and consumer's goods to people in 11 villages, who have been suffered from flood in August.

Economic Front:

Indonesia, the biggest Southeast Asia economy, has adopted a series of measures to offset the impact of the global market crisis. ***Malaysian*** opposition parties have exerted enormous pressure on government to revise 2009 budget in order to deal with ongoing economic turmoil. Despite unstable political scenario tourism hasn't got affected much in ***Thailand***. Just like other Asian countries key challenge for ***Singapore*** is to keep balance between energy demands and economic growth as growth as raised energy consumption. Meanwhile Singaporean economists have claimed that despite technical recession country is still in much better position than that in 1997 financial crisis. ***Philippine*** President announced to spend more to stimulate the economy and protect growth in order to cope with ongoing economic crisis. Trade volume between ***Laos*** and Thailand reached more than 1.6 billion USD during the first eight months of the year, an increase of almost 47 percent over the previous period.

GCC:

Political Front:

At ***Kuwaiti*** political front ousted ministers' announcement to attend parliamentary session created constitutional problem. Though the constitutional court cancelled their membership last month yet they have filed a petition for restoration in the Supreme Court. Speaker however dismissed their claim. Meanwhile Kuwait has rejected al forms of terrorism and has recently announced to establish first crisis centre. ***UAE*** reiterated its commitment to combat terrorism.

Geo-strategic Front:

Kuwait reiterated the importance of dialogue between Iran and IAEA in order to resolve Iranian nuclear issue. Meanwhile Kuwaiti MP also highlighted the importance of Arab-Iranian dialogue during his meeting with Ali Larijani. Kuwaiti Parliament extended full support to the Palestinian National Council's membership in the Inter-Parliamentary Union during a meeting of the Arab Group. Kuwait has also expressed serious concerns regarding regional security. Despite paying attention to Arab issues Kuwait has started preparations to have joint naval exercises with NATO fleet. ***Saudi Arabia*** emphasized greatly on the importance of unity for Lebanon. Meanwhile Saudi government has started playing the role of mediator between Taliban and Afghan

government in order to prevent Pakistan from slipping into extremism. UN has announced to hold a high level of inter-faith dialogue at the request of Saudi Foreign Minister. ***UAE*** has reiterated the importance of unity among different Palestinian factions in order to achieve their objectives. Growing ties between Jordan and UAE also remained significant. Lastly UAE has extended recognition to Kosovo. ***Bahrainian*** Crown Prince emphasized greatly on boosting ties with Singapore. ***Qatar*** has been putting efforts to enhance ties with Iran and Eritrea. Likewise Qatari government sent relief plane to Kyrgyzstan to boost ties with that country. Meanwhile Qatar's role in Darfur crisis has been highly appreciated by the UN. Qatar has also offered to play the role of mediator in Palestinian crisis. The International Parliamentary Union (IPU) Council has unanimously approved ***Oman's*** Majlis Ash'shura joining the body. Besides that Oman remained active in boosting ties with Malaysia and Turkey. ***Yemen*** also remained keen to enhance ties with Turkey and Sweden.

Social Front:

King Abdullah of ***Saudi Arabia*** approved a strategy concerning Talent program submitted by the King Abdul Aziz and His Companions. This strategy intends to promote gifted people having skills in science, technology, leadership, initiative and management. Meanwhile International amnesty condemned Saudi government for targeting poor foreigners under their criminal laws. ***UAE*** has urged international community to cooperate in social sectors to enhance development. Human Rights Watch has asked ***Bahrain*** to abolish death penalty in order to protect human rights. The World Health Organisation has hailed the advancements made in health care in the Sultanate of ***Oman*** during the prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos; who has been given the title of "Justice and Humanity Personality for 2008" by the World Press.

Economic Front:

Saudi Minister of Labour claimed that current economic crisis won't affect jobs in Saudi Arabia. High officials of ***UAE*** have expressed satisfaction over their stable economy despite ongoing economic crisis being faced by the whole world. ***Bahrain*** has declared human capital to be the real growth engine.

Fertile Crescent:

Political Front:

At political front few developments have been observed in ***Jordan*** where the two Houses of Parliament have assured full cooperation with other branches of government in order to fulfill King Abdullah's vision for development. Meanwhile Minister of Municipality denied approving municipality budgets lacking development programs.

Geo-strategic Front:

To begin with ***Iraq*** growing oil cooperation with Egypt and boosting economic ties with Bulgaria as well as Turkey remained key developments at geo-strategic front. Meanwhile growing Turkish-Kurdish relations might lead to a balanced solution for the Kirkuk issue. At ***Syrian*** geo-strategic front, Syrian efforts to enhance ties with Turkey, Lebanon (as Syrian President recently invited Lebanese Premier to visit Syria), Bahrain and Algeria appeared as significant. Meanwhile Syria reiterated its concern regarding Palestinian unity. In response to Syrian invitation ***Lebanese*** PM claimed that he should be sent an official invitation otherwise he would not pay visit to Syria. He further stated that Syrian President has never answered any of his letters hence he doesn't consider himself to be in a position to talk about Syrian-Lebanese relations. Meanwhile Lebanon has expressed satisfaction with Saudi-Lebanese ties. In case of ***Jordan*** its growing ties with UAE and Belgium grabbed attention.

Social Front:

Iraqi doctors have been allowed to carry arms for self defence amidst growing threats to them. Meanwhile ongoing violence in northern city of Mosul has led hundreds of Christians to flee from the area. While talking about targeting of Christians, government denied any chances of A\involvement of Al-Qaeda in these activities. Debates have started in parliament to sort out ways to stop anti-minority violence in the country. All the while water shortage in Diyala has also emerged as a significant issue. ***Syria*** held a regional workshop on 'Empowering women to get Civil Services', with the participation of various organizations from Jordan, Iraq, Tunisia, Sudan and Syria. A young ***Lebanese*** has recently designed first Super Car in Asia that would be able to compete with Ferrari. Labor Ministry in ***Jordan*** has putting efforts to increase wages of employers working in garment factories in the country.

Economic Front:

Iraq has signed a deal of $8 billion dollars with a renowned US electric company to generate 11,000 additional megawatts of electricity. At economic front ***Syria*** remained keen to attract investors from Italy, Germany and Belgian. ***Jordanian*** government has started encouraging its people to work in agriculture sector in order to reduce unemployment.

PART II

This part of the report is based on review of few articles related to East Asia. In this part I would try to discuss basic ideas of all these articles in terms of recent developments in the respective region.

Articles Review:

"ASEAN-China Partnership: A blossoming relationship"

Thitapha Wattanapruttipaisan: (head of Studies Unit, Bureau for Economic Integration and Finance, Asean Secretariat, Indonesia)

Bangkok Post (available at the official website of ASEAN)

October 5, 2006

Summary:

This short article focuses on ASEAN-China partnership mainly in economic sector. Writer provides data to indicate constant growth in ASEAN-China economic ties. Various sectors have been mentioned in this regard. Article starts with first ASEAN-Chinese dialogue that began in 1991 leading to blossoming relation of both in the strategic, political, security, economic, financial and socio-cultural spectrum. While collaborating closely; both have been able to overcome competing problems so far. Main areas of cooperation have been trade, investments and tourism. As both have achieved remarkable progress in these sectors strong political will is required to keep the pace.

Both ASEAN and China observed rapid growth in 1990s. Financial crisis of 1997-98 however adversely affected the economy of ASEAN but China could easily avoid major losses, hence kept growing rapidly. At that time it was commonly assumed that China would emerge as a global competitor. But it held meetings with ASEAN representatives and made policies to enhance economic cooperation with the organization as a whole and all member countries individually. Both therefore made Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation in 2002 that aimed to provide an Asean-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) within a decade; that has become a reality now. Trade in terms of export-import kept growing fastly, though trade deficit occurred in few countries yet it did not affect exports. China has also been enjoying high growth rate in electronic and technological sectors hence has been providing ASEAN with electric equipments as well. Large numbers of Chinese tourists in ASEAN have also made significant contribution in the economies of these countries. Lastly Chinese huge investments in ASEAN also seem to be worth mentioning.

Article ends with the point that ASEAN and China still have to explore undiscovered areas to further boost their cooperation. Political good will and forward-looking approach has been pointed as most effective mean to manage mutual problems in trade, investment liberalization and domestic structural adjustments. Strong political commitment at the top leadership level is required to maintain the centrality of Asean and the vibrant Asean-China partnership.

"Forming a Single Market: Theory and Reality"

Romeo A. Reyes (Senior Adviser, ASEAN-UNDP Partnership Facility)

ASEAN Publications

2008

Summary:

In this article writer explains the real concept of Single Economic Market; as has been aimed by ASEAN. Writer claims that its extremely difficult to form Single market amidst existing barriers within borders as well as across borders. While explaining the term Single market, writer points out that single market is one where barriers to the flow of goods capital and labour in the factor market have been removed in order to attain one price across countries. The whole community in this way starts functioning as a single country. As its impractical to remove all sort of barriers hence it can just be regarded as an idealist approach to form Single market. Writer on the other hand considers FTA to be more feasible idea.

While discussing various barriers that economic products have to face writer considers tariffs, import quotas, licensing and cumbersome customs procedures to be the most significant ones. Meanwhile attainment of single currency and then same rate of a commodity even beyond borders have been regarded as the toughest barriers to remove. It is usually hard even for a country to have same rates in all its regions hence it seems more difficult for various countries to attain same rates across borders.

ASEAN though has expressed its objective to form ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) a single market but it does not seem to be a practical idea. ASEAN therefore should keep its focus on attainment of FTA being more feasible. ASEAN though intends to remove barriers from trade yet removal of all barriers seems to be impossible. Though ASEAN has been putting efforts to include various characteristics of Single market with that of FTA in order to attain close economic integration within the region; yet total achievement of Single Market objective is impractical. Lastly writer appreciates ASEAN's efforts to attain FTA with other regional players including China, Japan, South Korea, India, Newzeland and Australia.

"Will ASEAN Economic Integration Help the Poor?"

Romeo A. Reyes

ASEAN Publications

2008

Summary:

This article deals with the question of disparity among different members of ASEAN despite their close economic integration. Writer raises the point that till now economic integration of ASEAN has not been effective to help poor countries within the organization. Writer provides data to substantiate his argument indicating existing disparities within 10 members of ASEAN in the fields of per capita income and other dimensions of human development, such as life expectancy, literacy rate and poverty incidence. After giving brief account of existing gap among various nations within ASEAN, writer emphasize on the need to narrow down these discrepancies in order to achieve goal of economic integration and Single economic market successfully; as ineffective integration in this regard would not be continued. Various summits have been held so far to focus exclusively on this issue.

To make economic integration effective and beneficial for the poor; writer comes up with a number of recommendations. Firstly, an innovative and creative public information and communication strategy is required to enhance awareness of investors and consumers, producers and traders, exporters and importers, employers and workers. People should be told that economic integration is a necessity and not a choice in today's globalized world. Secondly, less developed countries should make their integration into economic markets more effective by using experience of developed countries. Thirdly, ASEAN should be made an attractive production base in order to bring benefits for workers. Markets should work in a competitive way and long term economic benefits should be distributed among all. After giving few recommendations writer concludes by saying that pro-poor trade and investment policies should be formally designed to bring benefits of economic integration to the poor. Hence strong advocacy, political commitment and public support can play an effective role in reducing economic inequities and development divide within ASEAN.

"Beyond the Current Crisis, Thai Tensions Run Deep"

Seth Mydans (the Southeast Asia Correspondent for the NY Times)

New York Times

October 19, 2008

Summary:

This article focuses on recent political crisis in Thailand. It is a descriptive article adding few lines of analysis. Article begins with description of anti-government protests that were held on October 7, in Bangkok leading to use of force by security forces hence further deteriorating the situation. Army also severely criticized the ruling regime for use of force against its people yet military general denied any chances of military coup as it would further intensify political crisis. Meanwhile Prime Minister has asked military and various other factions to unify in order to meet Cambodian border challenge successfully. Thai-Cambodian border dispute though seems to be quite significant yet people in Thailand don't seem to be prepared to settle their political disputes by making compromise.

While analyzing Thai political situation writer claims that fragmentation of society into various groups has increased their intolerance for one another. Pro-Thaksin and anti-Thaksin groups dominate the whole society; meanwhile other pressure groups and economically deprived wings also contribute potent role in intensifying chaos and mayhem. King of Thailand, though lacks political power, yet had been effective in resolving such crisis previously hence pubic is looking forward to King's intervention in ongoing political stalemate in order to make things better. King has been found to be silent so far.

PART III

Relevant East Asian Sources:

Description of some of the relevant East Asian sources is given below:

ASEAN:

Website: http://www.aseansec.org

The ASEAN official homepage is maintained by the Public Affairs Office of the ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta.

Description of the web site:

This web site gives an overview of ASEAN in terms of its establishment, achievements and objectives; with prime focus on political and economic aspects. Profiles of all member countries have been included in the site. It also includes detailed account of all ASEAN summits. List of key ASEAN projects has been given as well. Press Releases include policy statements and speeches of ASEAN members in different meetings. Section named as 'Publications' includes Annual

reports focusing on various themes like Annual Report 2006-2007 gives detailed account of 12th ASEAN Summit, ASEAN's year in external relations, cooperation, security community, economic community, socio-cultural community and ASEAN meting calendar.

Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)

Website: http://www.cicp.org.kh/

Description of the institute:

The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) is an independent, neutral, and non-partisan research institute based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. CICP promotes both domestic and regional dialogue between government officials, national and international organizations, scholars, and the private sector on issues of peace, democracy, civil society, security, foreign policy, conflict resolution, economics and national development. Its publication list includes:

I. Research Publications

II. CICP Working Paper

III. Conference Publications

IV. Lecture Reports

V. The Conference Working Paper Series

Vi. Newsletter

Besides that it also includes CICP Releases but none of its publications have free access.

Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta

Website: http://www.csis.or.id/

Description of the institute:

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta is an independent, non-profit organisation focusing on policy-oriented studies on domestic and international issues. It was established in 1971. Its publications include:

Working Papers

› Books

› The Indonesian Quarterly

› Analysis CSIS

› Clippings

› Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies

Out of this list only Working Papers can be accessed without any charges.

Institute of Strategic and International Studies, (ISIS) Malaysia

Website: http://www.isis.org.my/

Description of the institute:

ISIS was established on April 8, 1983. An autonomous and non-profit organisation, ISIS Malaysia is engaged in a wide range of activities focusing on objective and independent policy research and fostering dialogue and debate between the public sector, the private sector and academia. In general it focuses on Defence, Security, foreign Affairs, Nation building and economic sector. It has a detailed section of articles and papers focusing on various issues like Jihad, Oil crisis etc.

Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

Website: http://www. iseas.edu.sg/

Description of the institute:

The Singapore APEC Study Centre was established in 1994. The Regional Economic Studies (RES) programme focuses on a broad range of economic issues in the Asia Pacific region, with a special emphasis on the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The programme covers a variety of research and research-related activities from workshops, conferences, seminars, training programmes, to the publication of journals and articles and includes partnerships with other research institutions, universities and development organizations. It has a lot of publications but none of them are available online. Though it has also subscribed to few of e-Journals yet they can't be opened without charges.

Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS)

Website: http://www.isisthailand.polsci.chula.ac.th/

Description of the institute:

ISIS was founded in 1981 as the Southeast Asian Security Studies Program within the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University. In February 1982, its status changed when it became an institute officially sanctioned by Chulalongkorn University, entrusted with the task of conducting independent research and disseminating knowledge on international and security issues. Publications by ISIS cover a wide range of national and international security issues in Thai and English, such as "The Environment and National Security of Thailand" in Thai, and "Ethnic Conflicts in Southeast Asia" in English. All of its publications can be accessed without any charges.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Fertile Crescent

Aisha Rehman

From 11th to 17th October, 2008

Iraq

Economic front

- $8 billion contracts to generate 11,000 additional megawatts of electricity in Iraq

Social issues

- Iraqi doctors can carry arms to 'defend themselves'
- Ministry reopens files of murdered journalists
- Christians flee en mass from Mosul amid new wave of terror
- Qaeda not involved in forcing Christians to leave Mosul, government says

- Baghdad not as ‘secure’ as government claims, residents say
- Doctors refuse to work in Karbala following threats
- Iraqi minorities are not for sale
- Diala police to handle water shortage

Geo strategic relations

- Iraq and Egypt boost oil cooperation
- VP calls on Bulgaria to activate cooperation with Iraq
- Sulaimaniya, Diyarbakir ink MoU on economic cooperation
- $248,000 services projects set up in Arbil
- Turkish-Kurdish overture may establish federal Kirkuk region-MP

Syria

Political front

- President al-Assad Issues Law on Power Consumption Efficiency Standards for Electric Equipment

Social front:

- Regional Workshop on Empowering Women to get Civil Services

Geo strategic issues

- Syria and Turkey to develop land transportation
- President al-Assad Renews to Salloukh Syria's Position on Establishing Best Relations with Lebanon
- UN Secretary General Welcomes Establishing of Diplomatic Relations between Syria and Lebanon
- King of Bahrain Affirms Importance of Achievements and Development of Syrian-Bahraini Relations

- Otri and Ou-Yahya Call for Boosting Bilateral Relations
- Meeting UNRWA Commissioner, Minister Bilal: Syria for Enhancing Palestinian National Unity

Economic front:

- Al-Dardari Briefs Italian Businessmen on Investment Opportunities in Syria
- Badr Reviews Investment Opportunities in Syria with Arab-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce Delegation
- Minister of Economy Calls on Belgian Investors to Invest in Syria
- Secretary General of the Arab-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry Calls for Increased Cooperation with Syria

Lebanon

Geo strategic front

- Jumblattt: Yes to meeting Nasrallah, No to apologize to Syria
- Siniora prefers silence to avoid quarrel with Syria
- Abu Jamra praises but Aoun attacks Saudi Arabia
- The US journalists were kidnapped, smuggled, jailed by Syria

Social front

- Lebanese army arrests terrorists behind Tripoli explosions

Economic front

- Lebanon's first formula-style car to compete with Ferrari class cars

Jordan

Political issues

- Lawmakers pledge cooperation with gov't
- Amman, Budapest agree to boost cooperation
- Peace talks should go on despite political changes'
- Law on state budget regulation referred to committee
- Municipality budgets required to include development projects

Social issues

- Union seeks higher wages for Jordanian QIZ workers

Economic issues

- Ministry seeking help to produce electrical power from solid waste
- Jordan to host Eco-Cities Forum
- PM considers changing fuel pricing mechanism

Geo strategic issues

- Dahabi highlights Jordan-UAE ties
- Missing family in Lebanon found
- Jordan, Belgium initial accord to safeguard investments

Iraq

Economic front

$8 billion contracts to generate 11,000 additional megawatts of electricity in Iraq

The Ministry of Electricity has signed $8 billion deals with the U.S. General Electric, Siemens and other Western engineering firms for the construction of power plants that will generate 11,000 megawatts, electricity minister said. Kareem Waheed said the bulk of the money will go to General Electric, or GE, a multinational U.S. technology conglomerate. He said GE will build plants with a capacity to produce 6,800 megawatts.

Siemens, Europe's finest and largest engineering company, will build plants capable of producing 2,000 megawatts. Waheed said the deals were complete as memorandums of understanding had been signed with each of the firms long time ago. But he said the ***firms were reluctant to start working in Iraq due to high levels of violence.***

Acute power shortages and protracted blackouts that continue for nearly 20 hours a day in major Iraqi cities have been a characteristic of U.S.-administered and occupied Iraq.

Iraq currently ***produces 5,500 megawatts, which*** is still below the amount its rickety and sanctions-hit power plants used to generate under former leader Saddam Hussein.

Waheed put Iraq's ***current power needs at 11,000 megawatts***.

Social issues

Iraqi doctors can carry arms to 'defend themselves'

The government has allowed Iraqi doctors to carry arms amid rising violence targeting Iraqi professionals. "Doctors are permitted to carry weapons to defend themselves," said a new ruling the government issued this week. The decision comes amid reports that scores of Iraqi doctors have been assassinated or kidnapped since the 2003-U.S. invasion.

Special licenses to carry weapons will be issued by the Interior Ministry. The ***government has even made it 'illegal'*** for police or security forces to detain doctors. Orders to have them apprehended must be first signed by the Health Minister.

The Health Ministry says thousands of Iraqi doctors, among them top consultants, have fled the country. Under new regulations, Iraqi doctors' salaries are comparable to those in neighboring countries. In addition, there is a hefty bonus of more than 1 million dinars (approx. $1,000) for every operation they carry out. The ministry says more than 600 doctors have returned home in the past few months.

Ministry reopens files of murdered journalists

The Ministry of Interior has reopened the case of scores of Iraqi journalists who were either assassinated or kidnapped in the past few years, a senior ministry official said.

Lt. Gen. Abdulkarim Khalaf said Iraqi police have begun investigating at least 49 files related to Iraqi journalists killed or kidnapped in the spiral of violence that engulfed the country since the 2003-U.S. invasion. Khalaf said the ministry was coordinating its efforts with a non-governmental body on press freedoms with the regard to all the cases which it could not pursue in the past. Scores of Iraqi journalists have been killed or kidnapped but none of the perpetrators has ever been brought to justice.

Christians flee en mass from Mosul amid new wave of terror

Iraqi Christians are fleeing the northern city of Mosul, leaving behind houses and personal belongings amid a new wave of violence in the city. ***Church sources say at*** least 10 Christians have been killed in the past few days with families receiving written and verbal threats either to leave or bear the consequences. ***Church reports say some 500 families have fled the city to*** the string of Christian villages in the eastern and northern outskirts of Mosul. These villages are relatively quieter but the influx has already strained their meager resources.

Many families have nowhere to go as schools and other public buildings in these villages are already crammed with refugees.

Sami al-Maleh member of a political faction grouping various Christian denominations says ***Christians in Mosul now receive daily threats*** "with statements handed out in the city alleys and streets demanding that they leave the city. We do not know who is behind these threats but ask the provincial authorities to bring the criminals to justice."

Qaeda not involved in forcing Christians to leave Mosul, government says

There are no indications that the Qaeda group in Iraq is involved in forcing Christians to flee the northern city of Mosul, a senior Interior Ministry official said. But Ministry spokesman Abdulkarim Khalaf declined to say who was behind the latest wave of anti-Christian violence in the city, a traditional center of Christianity in Iraq. However Khalaf said, "I do not think al-Qaeda

is behind the attacks against Mosul Christians." More than 1,300 Christian families have fled the city and more than 13 Christians have been killed in the past two weeks.

Baghdad not as 'secure' as government claims, residents say

The security situation in Baghdad has aggravated recently amid a rise in car bombings and attacks directed mainly at government troops. Residents say conditions are worsening in the Iraqi capital once again despite the heavy presence of Iraqi security forces and a surge in number of checkpoints. The troops have complicated life in the city as they regularly cordon off streets and areas, set up temporary checkpoints and shut streets and bridges to traffic. Some residents spend most of the day in their cars before reaching their offices or shops. Snipers have returned to the city but now they aim their bullets solely at Iraqi troops. Car bombers have made a comeback with three major bombings killing and injuring scores of people last week. Troops are being deployed and redeployed in the light of needs and attacks. Some Iraqi army units are applying U.S. Marines' methods during their deployment. They try to close roads they use to traffic and forbid Iraqi drivers approaching their convoys.

Doctors refuse to work in Karbala following threats

Up to 200 doctors in the religious city of Karbala have closed their clinics, the head of the union of Iraqi physicians and dentists in the city said. Ali Abutaheen said the strike, which has crippled public medical services in the city, comes following threats by tribal leaders to kill some doctors. The tribal chieftains blame the physicians for the death of their followers in operation rooms. There many specialists among the striking doctors and their decision to stop working has paralyzed performance of some critical surgeries in the city hospital. The doctors urged the government to protect them and force the tribes to accept legal arbitration in cases like these. In a statement, they said, they were determined not to return to work unless the government guarantees their safety. Last month, the government decided to allow Iraqi doctors to carry guns amid reports that attacks targeting medical experts were increasing.

Many Iraqi doctors now demand relatives to sign documents that they will not be held accountable if things go wrong. Abutaheen said medical experts in Iraq were working under extremely difficult circumstances. He said two of his doctors were forced to pay huge sums of money to relatives "though our investigations showed that they were not blame for the death of the patients they operated on.

Iraqi minorities are not for sale

Iraqi legislators have revoked a paragraph in the constitution that gave a set of seats for Iraqi minorities in provincial councils. The reason they cited was that there was no "authentic count" on the number of these minorities in the country. But this is a ***baseless excuse and pretext*** to violate the rights of Iraqi Christians, Shebeks, Sabeans and Yazidis for whom land of today's Iraq has been a habitat from time immemorial. There must have been other reasons which prompted the parliament to take a decision that has alienated an important and crucial component of the Iraqi society. Iraqi ***minorities thought they*** would be treated much better than under former leader Saddam Hussein whose regime the U.S. toppled in 2003. To say the government lacks credible counts of Iraqi minorities is a big lie. Such counts could have easily been obtained from their religious leaders.

Iraqi minorities, who thought they would be better off under a U.S.-protected government, suddenly find themselves without protection.

Diala police to handle water shortage

Digging work has begun on 200 artesian wells in different parts of Diala, a local police chief said on Wednesday, noting that this work is a contribution by security forces to tackle the shortage of water in the province. "Diala police command supervised the digging work," Staff Brig. Abdelhussein al-Shamri said during his meeting with a number of Diala chieftains. The stability in the security situation should be matched by an equivalent improvement in services, Shamri noted. Diala province, a mix of Sunnis and Shiites, extends to the northeast of Baghdad as far as the Iranian border. Its capital is Baaquba, 57 km northeast of Baghdad. It covers an area of 17,685 square kilometers (6,828 sq mi). A large portion of the province is drained by the Diala River, a major tributary of the Tigris.

Geo strategic relations

Iraq and Egypt boost oil cooperation

Iraq and Egypt has agreed to rehabilitate the country's oil infrastructure under a deal that will see Egyptian firms actively working in the country for the first time since the 2003-U.S. invasion. The agreement is one of the fruits of the surprise visit by Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit to Iraq. "The Ministry of Oil has struck deals with several Egyptian foreign firms to revive the country's oil sector and extend help in areas of digging, extension of pipelines and construction of oil installations," a ministry statement faxed to the newspaper said. Egypt's Energy Minister Sameh Fahmi was I the delegation that accompanied Gheit to Baghdad.

Fahmi held meetings with his Iraqi counterpart, Oil Minister Hussein al-Shahristani which concentrated on practical steps that make it easy for "Egyptian firms to develop Iraqi oil companies." Egypt has said it would soon reopen its embassy in Baghdad.

Under one of the deals Egyptian firms are to rehabilitate natural gas installations in Baiji, north of Baghdad.

Baiji is the site of the largest Iraqi refinery complex with a capacity of more than 350,000 barrels a day. The Egyptians are also to build 20 filling stations in the country and hold training courses for Iraqi oil personnel.

VP calls on Bulgaria to activate cooperation with Iraq

Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi on Wednesday called on Bulgaria to activate its economic and industrial cooperation with Iraq, to ***reinforce the historic relations between the two countries***, according to a release issued by al-Hashemi's office. "Al-Hashemi today received the Bulgarian ambassador in Baghdad, and discussed with him methods of reinforcing and expanding the horizons of mutual relations between the two states," said the release that was received. "During the meeting, al-Hashemi submitted a number of suggestions to the ambassador, aiming at activating the historic relations between the two countries, especially in the fields of oil, power, and excavation industries," it added. For his part, the ***Bulgarian ambassador in Iraq said that*** his country is "interested in investing in the economic fields of Iraq." The ambassador also invited the VP to visit Bulgaria, but the release did not mention whether al-Hashemi accepted the invitation.

Sulaimaniya, Diyarbakir ink MoU on economic cooperation

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the chambers of commerce and industry in Iraq's Sulaimaniya and the Turkish province of Diyarbakir to boost mutual cooperation. "The signing ceremony was attended by the chairmen of booth chambers and was held at the headquarters of Arbil's Chamber of Commerce," the chairman of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Sulaimaniya, Hassan Baqi Horami, told. The ***MoU aims at***

establishing strong economic and trade relations between the two chambers. Companies from both cities will be invited to attend trade exhibitions and to exchange economic and trade information, Horami noted. A delegation from the Sulaimaniya chamber will arrive in Diyarbakir to participate in a workshop on adopted schemes of work in the city, according to Horami. Diyarbakir is the largest city in Turkish Kurdistan. Situated on the banks of the River Tigris, it is the seat of Diyarbakir Province, and has a population of 2.5 million. The modern city of Sulaimaniya, 364 kilometers north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, was founded in 1748 by a Kurdish prince known as Ibrahim Pasha Baban who named it for his father Sulaiman Pasha. Since being founded as the capital of a powerful Kurdish principality it has grown to about 1,800,000 people. Sulaimaniya, known as Zamwa prior to its founding, is the cultural center of the Sorani-speaking Kurds and an important economic centre for Iraqi Kurdistan.

$248,000 services projects set up in Arbil

Four services projects worth nearly $248,600 have been implemented in Arbil's Shaqlawa district, a local mayor said. "The ***projects concern the sectors of water, electricity and roads,"*** Dalawar Oumr told Aswat al-Iraq. Providing drinking water to the villages of Ba Rabyan and Harsham will cost nearly $180,500 (1 U.S. dollar =1,118 Iraqi dinars), the mayor added. Shaqlawa is a summer resort in Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Arbil, also written Erbil or Irbil, is believed to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited in the world and is one of the largest cities in Iraq. The city lies eighty kilometers (fifty miles) east of Mosul.

Turkish-Kurdish overture may establish federal Kirkuk region-MP

A lawmaker from the main Shiite bloc said the overture in Turkish-Kurdish relations might help find a compromise over the controversial issue of Kirkuk. "The Turkish-Kurdish overture might lead to finding a just and balanced solution for the Kirkuk issue by establishing it as a federal region," MP Abbas al-Bayati from the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) told. The MP expected the meetings between Turkish and Kurdish officials in Iraq would lead to "forge agreements of security coordination to control borders and to stem the infiltration of Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK) into Turkey." Turkish officials visited Baghdad and held talks with federal government officials and Kurdistan's regional president, Massoud Barazani. It was the first direct talks in four years between Turkey and Barazani, president of the three-province

semiautonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq. Turkey has been pressing the Iraqi Kurdish administration to cut supply lines in its territory used by the PKK, which has been fighting for autonomy in Turkey, and to arrest and hand over its leaders who live across the border in Iraq. Iraqi Kurds, which have their own police and armed force, are largely responsible for security in the northern areas of the country where the PKK operates rather than U.S. or Iraqi government troops.

Syria

Political front

President al-Assad Issues Law on Power Consumption Efficiency Standards for Electric Equipment

President Bashar al-Assad issued the Law Number 18 for 2008 on the standards of power consumption efficiency for electric equipment. The ***law aims to increase power*** consumption efficiency for electric equipment used in domestic, commercial and service sectors by applying power consumption efficiency standards on all equipment in Syria.

The ***law will also contributes to meeting the demands of sustainable*** development within the framework of clean development, bolster the competitiveness of locally-produced and imported equipment and reduce the negative effects resulting from generating electric energy. The law specifies the responsibilities of manufacturers, exports and distributors, in addition to infringements and their penalties. The National Center for Energy Research is responsible for applying this law. Equipment available in the Syrian market must not exceed the amount of annual electric energy consumption that is designated according to the nature of each device and its specifications. The full text of the law will be published in state newspapers, and will be put into effect after six months of its publication date. Standards of power consumption efficiency will also be published in state newspapers.

Social front:

Regional Workshop on Empowering Women to get Civil Services

The regional workshop on 'Empowering Women to Get Civil Services' was kicked off at Meridian Hotel in Damascus with the participation of organizations from Jordan, Iraq, Tunisia, Sudan and Syria. The ***workshop is organized in cooperation between*** the Syrian Family Planning Commission and the Arab Women Center for Training and Researches (Kawthar), funded by the

Arab Gulf Program for Support of UN Development Organizations. Assistant of Syrian Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Issa Maldaoun said Syria has made great strides in the field of women issues on the legislative level and their active participation in the economic and social development and the political life as well.

Geo strategic issues

Syria and Turkey to develop land transportation

Minister of Transport Ya'arub Badr said the meetings of Syrian-Turkish Technical committee for land transportation, concluded, dealt with issues related to increasing facilitations of land transportation between the two countries to boost trade exchange volume. "Both sides also ***discussed aspects of future cooperation in the fields of land, air, maritime and railways transportation***," Badr said in a statement to SANA, adding that Turkish Airlines seek to increase its flights between Aleppo and Istanbul to 5 time per week. ***On railways,*** the Minister said the two sides reviewed measures to begin running train lines between Aleppo and Gaziantep, expecting the line will be running during the first quarter of 2009.

President al-Assad Renews to Salloukh Syria's Position on Establishing Best Relations with Lebanon

During his meeting this morning with Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Fawzi Salloukk , President Bashar al-Assad renewed Syria's position and standing desire to establish best relations with brotherly Lebanon on all levels , stressing the necessity for the ***removal of all obstacles that hinder the march of the development of the historical relations that bring the two countries together*** . The president also stressed Syria's support to everything that can contribute to the strength and invincibility of Lebanon. Sallouk conveyed Lebanese President, Michel Suleiman greetings to President al-Assad. The steps that the relations between the two countries have taken since the Syrian-Lebanese Summit lat August and the substantial measures that have been taken to follow up the implementation of what was issued by the summit of decisions to boost these relations and meet the aspiration of the two brotherly peoples , were reviewed. Minister Salloukh expressed Lebanon's appreciation of Syria's stances under the leadership of President al-Assad ,which support Lebanon's unity , and stability , and of the measures that have been taken by Syria to develop these relations. The meeting was attended

by Foreign Minister , Walid Moallem and presidential Political and Media Advisor , Butheina Shaaban , and Sallouk's accompanying delegation.

During a joint statement issued following his talks with Moallem, Salloukh stressed that he touched during his meeting with President , Bashar al-Assad, all care to develop and consolidate the Syrian-Lebanese relations in the interest of the two countries , serving stability and accord of all the Lebanese citizens . The Lebanese foreign minister said that the relations between Syria and Lebanon are based on endless factors of kinship that have been derived from joint history, geography and interests and are not confined to the official political aspect only. He expressed pleasure for the signing of the joint statement issued by the foreign ministries of the two countries, announcing the start of the diplomatic relations between the two countries on the ambassadorial level. He underlined that the announcement of the start of diplomatic relations between the two countries constitutes an additional factor to be added to the distinguished relations between Syria and Lebanon which is derived from the unanimity of the Lebanese and expressed by Altaif Accord, and today by the political will of the two countries through the latest Assad –Suleiman Summit. The Lebanese foreign minister, indicated that his talks with Moallem dealt with aspects of bilateral relations and completion of what was done during the latest Syrian –Lebanese summit in addition to a number of regional issues, the peace process and the continued Israeli threat represented by the continuation of the occupation and escalation of the practices in the occupied Palestinian territories. He described the announcement of the establishment of diplomatic relations as the first step that has reflected the interest and good will of the two countries. He said that all the Lebanese leaderships welcomed President al-Assad's decision and issuance of the decree to establish diplomatic relations and to open embassies in both countries taking into consideration the sovereignty and independence of each country. He stressed the necessity for the presence of security cooperation between the two countries to keep away the ghost of smugglers and eradicate those who try to create sedition and plant explosives , and the mission of the two embassies will be in intensifying the joint action to maintain peace and security in both countries. Regarding the previously signed agreements between the two countries , Salloukh indicated that the agreements are being reviewed and studies by both sides and there is no objection if one of the parties wants to modify them if this falls in the interests of the two countries. For his part, Minister Moallem described Slloukh's meeting with President al-Assad as fruitful. He said in response to a question related to the the Syrian army deployment near the borders with Lebanon , Moallem said that the deployment of few hundreds of soldiers aimed at preventing smuggling and controlling the borders and that was agreed upon by the Syrian-Lebanese summit under the article :"Demarcation and Control of the Borders ", and was mentioned in the joint statement. He added that what happened was within the Syrian territories and any talk about it will be an intervention in the Syrian affairs , stressing brotherly intention toward Lebanon and care for its security and stability. He said what Syria was doing is in the service of security in Syria and Lebanon and any other interpretations will be for mere selfish political purposes that do not serve the interests of both peoples. He said that President Bashar al-Assad was the first to propose the exchange of diplomatic relations during the meeting of the Syrian-Lebanese Higher

Council in the presence of former Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, the then Premier , Omar Karami , and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri , and when President Suleiman visited Damascus this was mentioned in the issued statement . He added that the Syrian and Lebanese decision and the political will of the two countries are dictated by the interest and will of the two brotherly peoples and not to please any one , stressing that the opening of embassies in Damascus and Beirut will be accomplished before the end of current year. He expressed hope that the exchange of diplomatic representation will be a symbol and a window for boosting the historical brotherly ties and the two peoples will look to the future in the perspective of the two peoples interests, indicating that the relations between the two countries are not confined to diplomatic representation but also through the work of the Syrian-Lebanese Higher Council General Secretariat and of the various ministries in both countries. Concerning the task of the Syrian embassy in Beirut, Moallem indicated that the Syrian embassy will respect the Lebanese regulations and laws and there should not be high commissioners who are allowed to do that while others are denied this privilege in Lebanon , the laws should be applied on all ,and the Syrian ambassador will be the first to comply with these laws. Concerning the movement of the Syrian and Lebanese citizens after this announcement, Moallem stressed that the tend is grant more facilities than the present on passengers, and goods levels. Regarding the American position toward the Syrian policy, Moallem said that Syria has always called for constructive dialogue to discuss the issue of the region in center of which Syria is living and if the American have the desire to continue this dialogue we have no objection to it.

UN Secretary General Welcomes Establishing of Diplomatic Relations between Syria and Lebanon

Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon welcomed the announcement of establishing diplomatic relation between Syria and Lebanon. The Secretary General affirmed in a statement issued by his press office that this step will encourage the two countries to deepen constructive dialogue with each other.

King of Bahrain Affirms Importance of Achievements and Development of Syrian-Bahraini Relations

King of Bahrain Sheikh Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa affirmed the importance of the development and progress achieved in Syrian-Bahraini relations, underlining that President Bashar al-Assad is always keen on bolstering and developing these relations in all fields. King of Bahrain made the remarks in a meeting with Syrian Minister of Interior General Bassam Abdul-Majid, who relayed the best wishes of prosperity and progress from President al-Assad to King Hamad and the kingdom of Bahrain. During the meeting, King Hamad stressed the ***need to develop cooperation*** and cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the field of security which would serve to bolster the

stability of Syria and Bahrain. Later, Minister Abdul Majid met with Bahrain's Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman AL Khalifa, who affirmed the importance of cooperation in the fields of security between Syria and Bahrain to support efforts for achieving joint Arab security. Sheikh Khalifa pointed out to the standing level of ***cooperation between the two countries***, stressing the importance of communications and intensifying visits between security officials in order to protect Arab national security, combat crime and terrorism and preserve the stability of the Arab nation.

In turn, Minister Abdul Majid affirmed Syria's commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation with Bahrain, underlining the high level of competence, readiness and technology achieved by Bahraini security authorities.

Otri and Ou-Yahya Call for Boosting Bilateral Relations

Prime Minister, Mohammed Naji Otri, has underlined the strong deep historical relations between Syria and Algeria , indicating that the achievement of national and pan-Arab interest lies in the development of bilateral relations of cooperation.

At the Syrian-Algerian Higher Committee meeting in its first session in Damascus, Otri said that the meeting constitutes a gathering for the interaction of ideas and view points whereby the tracks of joint cooperation are given momentum in response to the directives of the leaders of the two countries , President Bashar al-Assad and his brother , President Abdul-Aziz Boutaflika , pointing out to the current regional and international circumstances that necessitate Arab solidarity and combination of efforts in the faces of the challenges.

He indicated that ***Syria has embarked on an important role in the achievement*** of the Lebanese national reconciliation and has supported the Lebanese national dialogue and everything that the Lebanese agree upon.

He stressed that the meetings in Damascus today form the base for getting ***the relations between the two countries move to a new phase*** and wide horizons in proportions with the potentials of the two countries and importance of their geographic positions.

Otr underlined the necessity for the development of forms of cooperation among the chambers of commerce, industry, agriculture, and maritime, and activation of the businessmen and investors' role with the aim of expanding inter -trade and exchange of commodities and national products.

For his part, Ou-Yahya undelined that the meeting of the Syrian-Algerian Higher Committee gains special importance on the political level because it is being held in critical and sensitive Arab and regional circumstances that require the intensification of consultation and coordination in the face of the imposed challenges on the Arabs, stressing his country's support to unity of Arab ranks, and activation of the Arab nation solidarity. He expressed confidence in

the potential of opening wide promising prospects of cooperation between the two countries. ***The two sides moved to discuss the approaches of joint cooperation in spheres of economy, trade, investment, agriculture, irrigation ,higher education , energy and environment.***

The two sides called for the achievement of real full integration among the factors of the Syrian and Algerian economies whereby Syria can get what it needs from Algeria and Algeria can get what it needs from Algeria. During the meeting the two sides agreed to complete discussion of the issues on their agenda by bilateral meetings of the participant's ministers.

Meeting UNRWA Commissioner, Minister Bilal: Syria for Enhancing Palestinian National Unity

Minister of Information Dr. Mohsen Bilal stressed that Syria works to enhance Palestinian national unity to face up to their sufferings and difficult conditions because of the Israel's occupation and its crimes.

Meeting UNRWA Commissioner-General Mrs. Karen AbuZayd, Dr. Bilal said Syria is offering all forms of support to the Palestinians and consider them in terms of treatment as Syrian citizens in all fields. He stressed that his Ministry will continue to support the activities of the UNRWA in Syria and offer all needed facilities to make its mission a success. The Minister reiterated that the Palestinian refugees have a right to return home as stipulated by the UN resolution, especially resolution No. 194.

Economic front:

Al-Dardari Briefs Italian Businessmen on Investment Opportunities in Syria

Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Abdullah al-Dardari affirmed on that Syria is a land of safety and real investment, calling on Italian businessmen and industrialists to increase their investments and projects in Syria.

Al-Dardari gave a detailed presentation at the Syrian-Italian Businessmen Assembly on the state of ***Syrian economy, investment opportunities, the steps taken by the Syrian government to develop economy, and the increase in investments and Syrian exports, underlining the increasing trade exchange between Syria and Italy.***

Other participants in the Assembly included Director General of the Syrian Investment Department Dr. Ahmad Abdul Aziz, who gave a briefing on his Department's work, and Director of the Industrial City in Hassia Khaledd Ezzuddin, who gave a presentation on the Industrial city near Homs.

He also affirmed the Syrian government's support of Italian companies working in Syria.

The ***two sides agreed to sign an agreement on developing exports***, encouraging investment, limiting unemployment, providing maintenance support and establishing a technological support center for the industrial and energy sectors in Syria, in addition to cooperation in training and rehabilitation. The Deputy Prime Minister also met with Executive Director of the World Food Program (WFP) Josette Sheeran and discussed with her cooperation between Syria and the Program in light of the current global food crisis. For her part, Sheeran expressed the ***WFP's interest in expanding cooperation with Syria***, praising the Syrian government's steps in that regard, particularly through the 10th five-year plan.

Badr Reviews Investment Opportunities in Syria with Arab-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce Delegation

Minister of Transport Dr. Yarub Badr affirmed that the facilitations provided by the Syrian government to Arab and foreign investment encourage the involvement of the private sector in the Ministry's various projects. During his meeting with a delegation from the Arab-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Minister Badr underlined investment opportunities in the fields of air, maritime and land transport in Syria, pointing out to the successful examples of ***joint projects*** between the private sector and the Ministry of Transport, particularly in Lattakia and Tartous harbors.

He also briefed the delegation on the planned projects which will be carried out using the BOT principle, most important of which are two roads, one of them extending from the Turkish borders to Jordanian borders while the other connects Tartous harbor and the Iraqi borders.

Minister of Economy Calls on Belgian Investors to Invest in Syria

Minister of Economy and Trade Dr. Amer Housni Lutfi called on Belgian businessmen and investors to invest in Syria due to the unique investment opportunities. During his meeting with a Belgian delegation from the Arab-Belgian Chamber of Commerce, including representatives of 26 Belgian companies, Dr. Lutfi underlined the developments in Syrian economy during the past

few years, pointing out to the issuing of numerous legislations and laws to meet advancement in economic fields in the world.

He stressed that the process of adopting the ***social market economy*** requires more efforts on the social side, adding that Syria still uses traditional methods to preserve its economy like maintaining a set interest rate.

For their part, Secretary General of the Arab-Belgian Chamber of Commerce Kaisar Hijazi and the accompanying delegation affirmed their interest in boosting the ***standing cooperation with Syria in economic, commercial and investment fields and their desire to hold investment projects in Syria.***

Secretary General of the Arab-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry Calls for Increased Cooperation with Syria

Secretary General of the Arab-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry Abdul-Aziz al-Mekhlafi affirmed the importance of Syria's role in various fields, underlining the progress it witnessed during the past few years.

During a meeting between a delegation from the Arab-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Assistant Minister of Economy and Trade Mohammad Ghassan Habash, al-Mehlafi ***stressed the importance of increasing economic***, commercial and investment cooperation between Syria and Germany, particularly since German imports from Syria are the highest among the European Union countries.

He also called on Syrian and German businessmen to ***increase cooperation***, which will serve both sides' interests.

For his part, ***Habash expressed desire for bolstering relations with the German side in various fields, pointing out that Syria a***nd Germany signed an agreement for protecting joint investments.

Lebanon

Geo strategic front

Jumblattt: Yes to meeting Nasrallah, No to apologize to Syria

Democratic gathering leader MP Walid Jumblattt said he did not mind meeting Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah if the Shiite party's chief expressed readiness for such talks.

"I am waiting for the meeting between Sheikh Saad Hariri and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. After that, If the party saw that a meeting with me is useful, then I wouldn't mind," Jumblatt told As Safir daily in an interview. Asked if doors were not closed for such a meeting, Jumblatt said: "In politics there is nothing closed."

The leader of the Progressive Socialist Party denied that he would soon hold talks with Head of the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc MP Mohammed Raad at Minister Talal Arslan's residence.

When asked why he criticized a visit to Iran by Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun, Jumblatt said: "I want Lebanon to stay out of axes whether be it Western or Eastern." ***He said he was ready for dialogue with Iran*** if the Islamic Republic took the initiative. But the agenda according to Jumblatt should include "the truce with Israel, implementation of the Taef Accord, the defense strategy, the excellent relations with Syria and if they (Iranians) wished to provide aid then this should take place only through the Lebanese state." Jumblatt, however, refused to apologize to the Assad regime.

He told As Safir that he would deal with the opposition based on dialogue and participation if the March 14 coalition wins the elections.

Siniora prefers silence to avoid quarrel with Syria

Premier Fouad Siniora has said that he prefers to remain silent about comments by his Syrian counterpart Mohammed Naji Otari and Foreign Minister Walid Mouallem that he has rejected invitations to visit Damascus. Siniora told that he preferred not to comment on the remarks of Otari and Muallem in order not to argue about the relations of the two countries. They said that Siniora has always sent letters to Syrian President Bashar Assad and Otari during national holidays but he never received replies.

The ministers also told that the prime minister will not hesitate to visit Damascus if he receives an official invitation. Mouallem also said Sunday that Siniora didn't need an invitation. He described Siniora ***as "a national unity prime minister in Lebanon,"*** adding that "an official has to go from one Arab country to the other to serve the public interest."

Abu Jamra praises but Aoun attacks Saudi Arabia

Deputy Premier Issam Abu Jamra said relations between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia has always been excellent, contradicting a declared stand by his boss Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic movement. Abu Jamra, a member of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, is to accompany President Michel Suleiman on a visit to Saudi Arabia. Abu Jamra, in an interview with the Saudi newspaper Okaz, said relations between Beirut and Riyadh would "always remain excellent." His remarks sharply contradicted a stand declared by Aoun in which he attacked alleged Saudi dominance over Lebanon.

The US journalists were kidnapped, smuggled, jailed by Syria

Two American journalists who went missing during a vacation in Lebanon were quoted Friday as saying they were "kidnapped" by their taxi driver and taken into Syria, where they were held in custody for a week before being released.

The two spoke to their newspaper upon returning to Jordan. They were released on in Damascus, where authorities said they had crossed the border illegally with the help of smugglers. In the report, Luck said the two had hired a taxi driver to take them from Lebanon to Syria. But instead of driving to an official border crossing where they expected to get an entry visa for Syria, the driver went off the main road, then "locked the doors" and demanded their money. Luck, of Oak Park, Illinois, said they refused to give the cab driver anything.

As they drove on, a military car showed up and pulled the taxi over, then moved the Americans and their luggage into their vehicle, Luck recounted. "We did not know we were in Syria until we saw a sign for Al Hosn Castle after 20 minutes of driving."

He said they remained in the Syrian jail for eight days. Syria's Foreign Minister said they were detained Thursday, a day after the U.S. Embassy put out an alert that they were missing.

The Associated Press could not reach Luck or Chmela and calls to their cell phone numbers were unanswered Friday in Amman. In Washington, the State Department declined to comment on the specifics of Luck's account of being held for a week, but said it was concerned that Syrian authorities had not promptly notified U.S. diplomats when the pair were detained.

Their disappearance was first reported by their families, prompting the U.S. Embassy in Beirut to raise the alarm and launch a search along with Lebanese authorities after the two failed to return as expected last weekend to Amman. Smuggling is common across the Syrian-Lebanese

border, particularly through back roads in remote parts of northern Lebanon. Recently, Syria deployed more troops on the border to crack down on smuggling and Islamic militants that Damascus says also infiltrate Syria from that area.

Social front

Lebanese army arrests terrorists behind Tripoli explosions

The Lebanese army says troops have arrested members of a terrorist group allegedly involved in recent bombings in northern Lebanon."Several members of a terrorist cell involved in the recent explosions in Tripoli have been arrested," the army said in a statement. The statement referred to Aug. 13 and Sept. 29 bombings in Tripoli. The bombings killed a total of 25 people, most of them Lebanese soldiers. The statement did not give further details. But a security official speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the press said three Palestinians were among those arrested. The statement says an explosives belt in their possession was confiscated. It says troops were still pursuing Abdel-Ghani Jawhar, a leading member of the cell.

Economic front

Lebanon's first formula-style car to compete with Ferrari class cars

In an otherwise dynamic Lebanese society, fast cars and car racing are almost out of common man's discussion. But a young graduate of Industrial Automotive Design could well change the trend with his opus Frem F1. David Frem, 25, a student of American University of Science and Technology is the proud designer of the first super car in Asia. Quiz him about what got him into designing the car and he beams, “I believed that Arabs needed to do something other than constructing buildings. I thought we could venture into heavy industries like automobile. Plus, I always had a dream to make a car that could race Ferrari.”

David firmly believes that his initiative towards designing and executing a formula car will be a great step to bring his nation on the international map for automobile engineering and car racing. He explains, “Manufacturing a car demands high level of intelligence. Even the best design engineer needs in-depth research and development to make a world-class car. Engineering will go to a new level and bring a new identity to my country.” Frem F1 named after its creator, is built with a 16v, 2.00 cc powerful Vw engine and has an independent suspension. It comes with multi-specialty functions such as strong xenon lights, camera for eased reverse parking, a convenient navigation system and a glass roof to offer panoramic view of the sky. The car with its body made from fiber glass is10 cm high from the ground for better stability and traction. Its aluminum steering is designed and made by David. The interiors is accessorised with Bose audio system and Audi gear box. 22 inches wide rims supported by Dunlop Sp9000 zr help the vehicle zoom by. The car's design was the subject of many studies conducted in Lebanon. David humbly adds that Frem F1's design is qualified to compete with the best cars in the world such as Ferrari, Lamborghini, Aston Martin etc. David will also have the honour of his creation

being exhibited at the 2009 North American International Auto Show in Detroit in January 2009. He reiterates, “If I had the financial resource, I would make the best super car in the world. I could make Frem F2 the best in the industry. It is high time we pay attention to design and technology.” David argues that tourism alone should not be the identity of Lebanon. “We can also work on other industries and develop a challenging market between all sectors,” he says.

Jordan

Political issues

Lawmakers pledge cooperation with gov’t

The two Houses of Parliament on Wednesday submitted their replies to King Abdullah’s Speech from the Throne, vowing cooperation with other branches of government to fulfil the King’s vision for development. In ***the Senate’s response,*** delivered by its president, Zeid Rifai, before the King at Raghadan Palace, he said: “The Senate will support the government to help it carry out all its programmes in the areas of priority, in pursuance of your Royal directives.” Senate highly appreciates His Majesty’s vision on the need to ***link socio-economic development to political development, in order to expand the base of participation in the decision-making and implementation processes and promote the principles of transparency, accountability and equal opportunities by following a decentralised local*** governance approach. He also emphasized that expanding the political participation on the national level is one of the main aims of the drive towards development and prosperity. The lawmakers are scheduled to elect in session members of the services and freedom committees and thus end the election of the 14 permanent committees. Earlier in the week, deputies avoided direct election for the legal, administrative, national guidance, education, health and environment, labour, energy and mineral resources, Palestine and badia committees.

Amman, Budapest agree to boost cooperation

His Majesty King Abdullah and Hungarian President Laszlo Solyom discussed means to develop political ties, regional developments and the European role in the region. In talks at the Royal Court, the two leaders expressed satisfaction over the development in the ***bilateral ties in fields of the economy and politics***. King Abdullah and Solyom emphasised their keenness to take measures that ensure better cooperation and open new horizons, especially in the fields of environment, education, tourism, water and investments. On ***the peace process,*** King Abdullah underlined the need for intensifying efforts seeking to push the peace process forward towards a permanent solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-state solution. The two countries also agreed to study the possibility of making Hungary a centre for reexporting Jordan's exports to Europe. Talks also covered means to enhance ***academic***

exchange between the two countries by granting scholarships that started following King Abdullah's visit to Budapest last year. The two countries are signatory to several agreements that constitute a legal background for enhancing bilateral ties, especially in the economic field, in addition to other deals in health, transport, water management, culture and scientific research.

Also yesterday, the Hungarian president and his wife visited tourism sites in Madaba and the Jordan Valley, including the Dead Sea Panorama, the Baptism Site and others.

Peace talks should go on despite political changes'

Prime Minister Nader Dahabi reiterated Jordan's position calling on the Palestinians and Israelis to press ahead with their negotiations, regardless of developments in the political arena. Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert has resigned and a new government is in the making in Israel, led by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. During a meeting with UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert H. Serry, Dahabi also stressed that the Israelis must stop all settlement activities, emphasising that they impede efforts to achieve peace in the region. Dahabi also called for national reconciliation among all Palestinian factions to strengthen the Palestinian Authority's position in the peace talks.

Law on state budget regulation referred to committee

Lawmakers to the Financial Committee a draft law on regulating the state budget amid rising criticism from economists and parliamentarians of spending by public institutions, which puts undue pressure on the state budget. ***Economists say a strict mechanism n***eeds to be set up to reduce public spending and limit the haemorrhage of state assets, particularly since the Kingdom is burdened with a JD7 billion foreign debt. Earlier this year, the ***IMF warned that Jordan faces fiscal*** vulnerability if it fails to rein in growing public spending that critics say is driven by political rather than economic concerns.

Municipality budgets required to include development projects

Municipality budgets will not be approved unless they include at least one development project per municipality, Minister of Municipal Affairs Shihadeh Abu Hdeib said. The ***measure aims to***

encourage local governments to engage the public in the development process across the Kingdom's 93 municipalities, the minister stressed. He added that the ministry is following up on the implementation of development ***projects in 18 municipalities*** around the Kingdom as part of efforts to address poverty and unemployment at the local level. The measure comes as part of the ministry's four-year strategic plan to engage the private sector in establishing development and investment projects, he said, stressing that the ministry will facilitate the initiatives by appropriating lands for such projects, he said.

Existing projects, which are currently being implemented, include a JD312, 000 public department complex project in North Mazar, a JD278, 000 tourist village in Northern Ghor, and a JD142, 000 stone saw in the Northern Badia District, according to ministry.

Social issues

Union seeks higher wages for Jordanian QIZ workers

The Labour Ministry is coordinating with the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing industries efforts to reach deals with Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) employers to raise the wages of around 12,000 Jordanians working in garment factories in these qualified zones to JD150, the union president said. Meanwhile, ***labour union leaders said they*** were satisfied with the government's decision to ***raise minimum wages from JD110 to JD150,*** although it was way below their expectations. The decision excluded QIZ workers and domestic helpers. Moreover, Emrani noted that around 15,000 other Jordanian workers are working in the garment sector outside the QIZs and will be included in the ministry's decision, stressing that unless QIZ employers increase their Jordanian workers' wages, the employees might start looking for new jobs with better benefits. The ministry's decision will take effect as of January 1, and it will be its responsibility to ensure employers abide by its regulations. The Kingdom's QIZ zones house 92 garment factories, employing ***around 44,000 workers*** from ***China, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh, in addition to Jordan***.

Economic issues

Ministry seeking help to produce electrical power from solid waste

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs, in cooperation with the Environment Ministry, is looking into prospects of producing electrical power with the help of the private sector.

Minister of Municipal Affairs Shihadeh Abu Hdeib met with selected local and foreign companies interested in carrying out a feasibility study on the project. Abu Hdeib said the ministry will study the offers to be submitted by these firms, for which the ministry will arrange a field tour of landfills to understand the situation, noting that one of the prerequisites to a feasible power-generating project is the availability of substantial quantities of solid waste. The tour would help the companies interested in the project have a better picture of the volume of waste collected in the two areas, he said.

If implemented, the project is expected to be “a good source of income for these municipalities, which can use the generated funds to carry out other development projects for the good of their local communities”, Abu Hdeib was quoted in a ministry statement as saying.

Jordan to host Eco-Cities Forum

More than 400 experts representing 17 countries will convene at the Dead Sea to tackle environmental challenges and opportunities in cities across the Mediterranean region. According to the Ministry of Environment, the forum titled, “The Eco-Cities of the Mediterranean” seeks to set criteria and standards of eco-cities in the region through launching “The Amman Call for Eco-Cities”.

“This forum is important in terms of the topics that are going to be discussed, for the first time in the region,” the ministry’s spokesperson, Issa Shboul, told. ***The focus during the three-day gathering*** will be on discussing alternative energy resources and the pollution phenomenon, said Shboul, adding: "It will also promote the adoption of environment-friendly practices and suggest policies, strategies and programmes with the cooperation of the relevant public and private sectors." In addition, the ***forum will discuss air and water***, green remedies and business solutions, the stick and carrot approach, cleaner production, sustainable eco-cities, greener buildings, greener transportation, renewable energy and energy conservation together for a better future. The forum is organised by the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Greater Amman Municipality, UNIDO and USAID in cooperation with Ministry of State for Media Affairs and Communications.

PM considers changing fuel pricing mechanism

The government is studying the possibility of a new mechanism to update prices of oil derivatives within a shorter time frame than the one-month span that is currently used, Prime Minister Nader Dahabi said. As it stands now, a pricing committee from the ministries of finance and energy, and the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company convenes on the 25th of each month and sets the prices of oil derivatives based on international prices. The premier said the measure is in line with a previous commitment by the government to reflect the global decline in prices of fuel derivatives on the local market.

The prime minister also emphasised the government's support of the agricultural sector, one of the most important factors that affects food security, a top priority for the government. The premier ***emphasized the importance of cooperation between all stakeholders in the public and the private sectors in the field of agriculture to*** realise King Abdullah's vision for the sector and help the sector overcome challenges.

It is important to encourage Jordanians to work in the agricultural sector and thus reduce unemployment, which stands at about 13 per cent, said Dahabi. He also promised farmers to follow up on their observations and take appropriates measures to address them.

Geo strategic issues

Dahabi highlights Jordan-UAE ties

Jordan and the UAE signed an agreement on Sunday to form a joint ministerial committee to cement bilateral cooperation in different fields. Also, Prime Minister Nader Dahabi met with UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Ben Zayed Al Nahayan, who is currently on a visit to the Kingdom during which he will meet with several officials. The ***agreement signed seeks to cement cooperation*** between Jordan and the UAE in several fields such as the economy, commerce and joint investments. ***The deal also aims to enhance cooperation in the fields of energy,*** agriculture, industry, environment, media, culture, education, scientific research, exchange of technical expertise and training, and entails activating the private sector's role in economic development.

The Kingdom and the UAE also signed a memorandum of understanding exempting holders of diplomatic passports from obtaining entry visas between the two countries.

Also yesterday, Minister of Foreign Affairs Salah Bashir met with his UAE counterpart to discuss regional developments and issues.

Missing family in Lebanon found

Lebanese authorities have informed Jordan that they located the missing Jordanian family late Saturday and were finalising the investigation in the case, a Foreign Ministry official said. The mother and her daughters, aged eight, five and three, disappeared on Thursday, October 2, while they were in their car waiting for the father, who was late, behind at the Beau Rivage Hotel where they were staying while spending the Eid Al Fitr holiday.

The five-member family were preparing to go sightseeing when, according to the father, an unknown person jumped in the driver's seat and drove away. The official said the ministry as well as the embassy is following up on the case.

Jordan, Belgium initial accord to safeguard investments

Jordan and Belgium initialled a reciprocal agreement on safeguarding and protecting Jordanian and Belgian investments in the two countries. Belgium's Ambassador to Jordan Jo Indekeu described the agreement as "a way of giving protection for investments on both sides", noting that the accord should be signed by the governments within six months in order to become effective. This step coincided with a visit to the country by a large Belgian business delegation comprising representatives of over 300 companies operating in different sectors. At present***, Belgium exports around JD100 million*** of goods to Jordan and ***imports products worth around JD10 million*** from the Kingdom. The visit is viewed as a platform for businessmen of the two countries to explore opportunities to enhance and strengthen trade flow between the two sides. He also underlined legal, judicial and administrative reforms introduced to the business environment, besides the steps taken to boost the private sector's contribution to the economy.

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Arab nations urged to boost status to counter global crisis: Bahrain PM

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Qatar sends relief plane to Kyrgyzstan

Qatar, Iran review co-operation ties and international issues

UN welcomes Qatar's mediation to solving Darfur conflict

Arab cmte on Darfur ends "positive" meetings in Sudan

UN hails Qatar's bid for peace in Darfur

Qatar urged to mediate between Fatah, Hamas

Qatar says Darfur mediators will meet in Doha

Qatar stresses on supremacy of law at UN

Qatar Emir holds talks with Eritrean president

Oman

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Qaboos named Justice Personality of the year

High WHO praise for Oman's healthcare

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More Omanis taking up jobs in private sector

International Desk

Omani Shura to take part in 119th parliamentary union meeting

Plea made to waive penalties of stranded visa changers in Oman

Oman becomes IPU member

Oman, Turkey hold talks

Oman, Malaysia seek to boost media relations

Yemen

Political Desk

Unity is the 3rd revolution and Yemen still on war against terrorism: PM

International Desk

Yemen tries nationals accused of spying for Iran

Saleh emphasizes the commitment of Yemen to strengthening relations with Turkey

Yemeni, Swedish security cooperation discussed

NEWS MONITORING REPORT

GCC

Social Desk

Municipality Ministers of the six Arab Gulf countries meet in the Qatari capital

Municipality Ministers of the six Arab Gulf countries meet in the Qatari capital, Doha, on October 21 to discuss how to deal with natural disasters.

Director general of Doha municipality Ibrahim Al-Maliki told a news conference on Saturday the two-day ministerial meeting would discuss a paper presented by Saudi Arabia and Oman over natural disasters, and proposals from Bahrain over a prize of the Gulf Cooperation Counci (GCC) for municipal work. Qatar will be submitting a paper about renovation of historic buildings, he said.

Gulf States plan to regularise alternative medicine practice

Gulf States are drafting a law to regularise alternative and traditional medicine in the region and will take a similar bill being reviewed in Bahrain as a model.

Member of the Executive Authority for the GCC Minister of Health Council Hala Al Mahza told a seminar early this week that five Gulf countries supported the immediate drafting of the law, while Saudi Arabia suggested reviewing the matter before drafting the legislation. She said that Bahrain's bill was considered as a model because of the similarity of Gulf societies.

Arab govts urged to make fight against corruption top priority

Despite the efforts of Arab politicians and civil society organisations, the goal of combating corruption is yet to become a priority on the agenda of Arab governments, noted officials and representatives of several Arab civil societies attending the parallel session of the fifth Forum for the Future, which opened in Dubai yesterday.
The representatives, who discussed various issues on education, social, political and economic reforms in the Arab and North African countries, stressed the need for peaceful mechanisms and transparency to regulate the functioning of institutions if the Arab world was to take its step towards democratic reform.

Further, participants stressed the need for Arab countries to pass legislation dealing with the right to access information into the internal workings of government.

Gulf panel to tackle women's issues

A Qatari envoy to the United Nations has outlined plans for a Gulf-wide committee designed to tackle domestic violence and other issues that affect the lives of women in the Arabian peninsula.

Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) were striving to improve conditions for women, Alya Ahmed bint Saif Al Thani, counsellor at Qatar's UN mission, told a meeting of the world body in New York.

Al Thani said the proposed committee would oversee bodies in all GCC countries that tackle domestic violence and work towards improving job and educational prospects for women.

Economic Desk

EU expresses desire to further boost ties with GCC

GCC secretary general Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah received a letter from French President Nicolas Sarkozy, rotating president of the European Union (EU), on Monday. Sarkozy, the secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) said, voiced desire to further boost relations and cooperation between the six-state GCC and 27-member EU for the best interest of both sides.

The EU and GCC are finalizing a free trade agreement (FTA), with both sides expressing desire to sign the agreement in near future.

Kuwait

Political Desk

Ousted Kuwaiti MPs vow to attend opening Assembly session

Former MPs Mubarak Al-Waalan and Abdullah Al-Ajmi yesterday created a constitutional problem after announcing that they will attend the National Assembly session on October 21 as Members of Parliament although the constitutional court scrapped their membership last month. Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi swiftly reacted by rejecting their claims, saying that rulings issued by the constitutional court cannot be negated except by a new verdict by the same court.

Last month, the constitutional court in a ruling scrapped the membership of Waalan and Ajmi and inducted Askar Al-Enezi and Saadoun Al-Oteibi as new MPs. The court, whose rulings cannot be challenged, based its verdict on the fact that there was a mathematical error in the calculation of votes obtained by candidates in the fourth and fifth constituencies in the May 17 general elections. Following a protest, the court re-calculated the votes and found that Enezi and Oteibi had in fact secured more votes than Waalan and Ajmi.

The ruling was criticized by some legal experts who said that mathematical errors even existed in the court ruling which later made other candidates to claim their right to Assembly seats. Waalan and Ajmi had already placed a petition to the constitutional court which set October 27 to look into it. The two claimed that the ruling had violated the law and should be revised.

International Desk

Rice to visit UAE, Oman next week

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will travel next week to Oman and the United Arab Emirates where she will attend a forum on democracy in the Arab world, the State Department said on Friday.

The forum serves as a platform to strengthen the partnership between governments and civil society of the broader Middle East and North Africa and to promote democratic reforms and respect for fundamental human rights.

Kuwait underscores importance of dialogue between Iran and IAEA

Kuwait on Thursday underscored the importance of continuing the dialogue between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in order to dissipate all doubts about its nuclear programme, and of making sure Israel accede immeidately to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and subject its nuclear facilities to the IAEA safequards. Addressing the General Assembly's disarmament committee, member of Kuwait's mission to the UN, counsellor Naser M'Hareb Al-Hayen said the "possession of nuclear weapons did not achieve security for any country. It only increased tension and conflict between peoples," stressing Kuwait's grave concern over the current status of international security.

Kuwait urges Arab states take unified stance on Al-Bashir's case

Kuwait's Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Hussein Al-Huraiti, in a statement inaugurating the extraordinary meeting for Arab justice ministers, urged the attending delegations to present the conference with their ideas and notions regarding the issues of Darfur and Al-Bashir, Sudan, as a prelude to taking a joint Arab legal stand on them.

Kuwait Health Minister begins Asian tour in Philippines

Kuwaiti Health Minister Ali Al-Barrak arrived in the Philippines capital Manila on Saturday, the first leg of an Asian tour which includes Singapore and Thailand with the aim of strengthening health cooperation. ministry is seeking to benefit from the Philippines expertise in the field of nursing, health in general, including treatment and rehabilitation of medical workforce.

Kuwaiti parliament supports membership of Palestinian National Council in IPU

Head of the Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation, member of parliament Dr. Walid Al-Tabtabai said on Sunday that the Kuwaiti delegation has supported the Palestinian National Council's membership in the Inter-Parliamentary Union during a meeting of the Arab Group today. Al-Tabtabai told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) the Kuwaiti delegation will intensify its contacts in order to ensure that the Palestinian National Council wins membership in the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Kuwaiti MP discusses riviving Arab-Iranian dialogue with Larijani

President of the Arab Interim Parliament (AIP) and Kuwaiti MP Mohammad Jassem Al-Saqer met Monday with Speaker of the Islamic Shura Assembly Ali Larijani. Al-Saqer told Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) on the sidelines of the 119th Inter-Parliamentary-Union (IPU) conference that the meeting was very important in order to revive the idea of an Arab-Iranian dialogue, which was endorsed by the Arab parliament two years ago but was impeded by events in the region.

Kuwait to establish first crisis center in the GCC

Kuwait will establish the first crisis center in the Gulf area, Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry official and member of the coordination committee for the establishment of crisis centers in the GCC said Abdullah Al-Mawid.

He told KUNA, after the third meeting for the coordination committee, that the center is the first in the region to deal with natural and humanitarian crises, enabling civil defense, emergency, fire and medical departments to work in united operation units in the case of a crisis in the Gulf.

Invasion of Kuwait was an act of inhumanity," says al-Maliki

A delegation of Kuwaiti journalists and reporters made a visit to the Iraqi capital, Baghdad on Thursday in order to meet the country's Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, its Vice President Tariq Al-Hashimi and National Security Advisor Muwafaq Al-Rabei.

The Prime Minister stressed that his country condemned the former Iraqi regime's invasion of Kuwait, adding that the people of Iraq had also fallen victim to the harsh policies of the former government.

He told the delegation headed by Director of the Kuwait Journalists' Association (KJA) Adnan Al-Rashid that he hoped the two countries' memory of the Saddam Hussein regime be wiped off, expressing optimism relations between the neighbourly countries would be further enhanced.

Kuwait gravely concerned by increased security challenges regionally, internationally

Kuwait on Thursday expressed grave concern at the increased nuclear dangers and security challenges regionally and internationally and urged the UN to place the elimination of nuclear weapons on top of its priorities, and the international community to pressure Israel to accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
Addressing the UN General Assembly's Committee on disarmament and international security, Kuwaiti diplomat Abdulaziz Soyan Alazemi said "my country views with deep concern the increase in the scope of security challenges and dangers on both, the international and the regional levels.

Defense and Security Desk

NATO navy fleet heads to Kuwait for military exercises

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Spokesman James Appathurai said here Wednesday that a naval force of NATO is on its way to the Gulf region for joint military exercises with members of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), including the State of Kuwait.

The State of Kuwait was the first Gulf country to sign an information sharing agreement and to join the ICI in line with specific frameworks in November 2004. Kuwait also had signed a security agreement with the NATO on information exchange during an international conference on NATO-GCC cooperation in Kuwait on December 12-13, 2006.

'NATO, Kuwait share desire to boost cooperation'

NATO secretary general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said here Wednesday the military alliance and the State of Kuwait have mutual desire to further boost cooperation. De Hoop Scheffer, in a meeting with KUNA and a delegation of Kuwaiti journalists, said there was a political dialogue with some countries in the Gulf region.
During that conference, he said, Kuwait and NATO signed a security agreement about the exchange of information. This agreement is a key landmark in the relationship between Kuwait and NATO since Kuwait joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) in November 2004.

Terrorism Desk

Kuwait rejects Terrorism in all its forms, calls for its definition

Kuwait late Thursday rejected Terrorism and criminal acts in all their forms and manifestations and urged the international community not to link them to any particular religion, civilization or ethnic group.

Addressing the General Assembly's legal committee, Kuwaiti diplomat Mohammad Abdullah Al-Ateeqi said that at the national level, Kuwait established a specialized unit for financial oversight and for the investigation of money-laundering and Terrorism financing.

Saudi Arabia

Social Desk

King Abdullah OKs Mawhiba strategy

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah approved a strategy concerning Mawhiba (Talent) programs submitted by the King Abdul Aziz and His Companions Foundation for the Gifted. The strategy, prepared by the foundation in consultation with international experts, was submitted to the king for approval.

The strategy focuses on the vision of the foundation until 2022 and comprises five major initiatives pertaining to science, technology, leadership, initiative and management. Some 30,000 gifted men and women will be sponsored by the foundation and another 80,000 students will be benefitted by the programs. The foundation also targets talented kids and gives them a chance to learn how to dig for information.

Saudi executions target poor: Rights body

Saudi Arabia executes convicted criminals at a rate of more than two a week and almost half of them are foreigners from poor countries, Amnesty International said yesterday. Saudi Arabia regularly executes murderers, rapists and drug traffickers, usually by public beheading, but judges sometimes give the death sentence to armed robbers and people accused of "sorcery" or desecrating the Holy Quran. The number of death sentences carried out last year shot up to 158, the London-based rights group said, from 36 the year before.

Saudi authorities reject criticism of the death penalty and beheading, saying it is a humane method sanctioned in Islam and that its application of Islamic Shariah law ensures justice for all residents of the country. Convicts are drugged beforehand.

Imams fail in their desired role: Naif

Imams of Saudi mosques have failed in guiding young Saudis away from extremist ideologies that pose a serious threat to the security and stability of the country, according to Interior Minister Prince Naif. “The more than 15,000 mosques in the country constitute the best forums for guidance, but the imams have failed miserably in discharging their duties,” Prince Naif said after opening a seminar on Human Rights in Higher Education and Intellectual Security at Umm Al-Qura University in Makkah on Wednesday night.

Shoura looks at Saudis abandoning families abroad

The Shoura Council has called for investigation into cases of Saudi husbands abandoning their foreign wives and children abroad. Increasing cases have been reported of Saudi men marrying foreign women while abroad, siring children and abandoning them once they leave to return to the Kingdom.

n the meeting, Shoura’s members called for a relaxation of the rules governing marriages with foreign women so that Saudi men are not forced to break the law, a situation which has led to the emergence of the current problem, with husbands and fathers relinquishing their responsibilities upon their return home.

Foreign Labor Desk

Proposed Saudi law holds out hope for employers, domestic workers

A draft law for governing proposed companies that will oversee recruitment of foreign labor aims to simplify the recruitment process while guaranteeing the rights of both employers and workers, officials say.

“The new companies that will replace the present recruitment agencies would supply workers in a matter of days and put an end to the phenomenon of runaway maids. There is a provision for the employers to get immediate replacements in the event of any maid running away. The law also stipulates regular payment of salaries and a mandatory eight-hour rest for the domestic workers,” said Saad Al-Baddah, chairman of the National Committee for Recruitment at the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Economic Desk

Financial crisis won't affect jobs in Saudi Arabia – Gosaibi

In wide ranging comments made at an Eid celebration at the Ministry of Labor, Saturday, the Minister of Labor, Dr. Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, said that the global financial crisis will not increase unemployment in the Kingdom in spite of the bankruptcy and downsizing of companies. He said that the pillars of the Saudi economy are solid and not affected by deteriorating global financial markets. Unemployment in the Kingdom, he pointed out, is an issue related to the jobs available in local development projects.

Dr. Al-Gosaibi said that the Ministry of Labor is hoping to stay away from introducing a minimum wage law for ethical and legal reasons. Some companies, he said, pay as little as SR800 a month which is embarrassing and humiliating to the country. The Minister said that he is asking such companies to increase both the salaries and on-the-job training for their employees.

Regarding the employment of women, he said that his Ministry does not want to get involved with the clash of ideology that goes along with the issue of the employment of women in the Kingdom, saying that the Ministry of Labor is not a part of this contentious issue even though there are some who would like to involve it. The Minister said there are regulations that advance women’s employment in the Kingdom in accordance with the Islamic Shariah. However, the final decision on a woman’s employment is up to her and her family. The government’s responsibility is limited to providing a suitable environment for her employment.

International Desk

Saudi-owned TV website hit by cyber attack (sectarianism)

Computer hackers claiming to be Shiite shut down the website of Saudi-owned satellite channel Al-Arabiya on Friday, a month after Iran reported similar attacks on many of its websites by hardline Sunnis. The website of the Dubai-based channel was taken over by the hackers who displayed a message which warned that "if attacks on Shiite websites continue, none of your websites will be safe". The page also displayed a picture of an Israeli flag on fire.

Al-Arabiya issued a statement saying that its website had "come under organised cyber piracy performed by extremists". The statement said that Al-Arabiya will continue to adhere to its policy of being "moderate, balanced and objective". Iran's Fars news agency reported last month that Wahhabi hackers had attacked 300 Shiite websites, including Shia Islam's most popular site linked to the faith's Iraq-based spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. It was referring to the ultra-conservative doctrine of Sunni Islam that prevails in Saudi Arabia.

U.N. to hold high-level interfaith meeting at request of Saudi FM

The president of the U.N. General Assembly announced in a statement last night that a high-level meeting on interfaith dialogue will take place on November 12-13 upon a request of Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal in the name of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and the Arab Group in the Kingdom's address delivered by Prince Saud at the 63rd session of the U.N. General Assembly late last September.

The high-level meeting is expected to continue the process started in Madrid in July when Saudi Arabia initiated a three-day interfaith dialogue. “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is eager to encourage dialogue, understanding and cooperation between religions and cultures, thereby promoting peace and harmony,” Prince Saud said in his address.

Saudi King asserts importance of Lebanon's safety, unity

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia underscored Sunday keenness on the safety and unity of Lebanon. King Abdullah, during summit talks with visiting Lebanese President Michal Suleiman in red Sea city of Jeddah, said it was important that Lebanon return to the Arab fold in an active manner, state-run news agency (SPA) said.

Saudi Arabia urges Arab countries to join hands against organized crime

Saudi interior minister Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz said Sunday Arab countries should join hands to fighting organized crimes and cross-border crimes, as well as activating agreements on extradition of criminals. Prince Nayef was speaking during the 2nd Arab conference of chief prosecutors here.

Saudi Arabia hosts Taliban talks to bolster Pakistan

Saudi Arabia is mediating between Taliban and Afghan officials to prevent its ally Pakistan from sliding into Islamist violence and to wean the Taliban away from al Qaeda, diplomats said on Wednesday.They said Saudi Arabia is worried that Islamist forces including the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies are succeeding in destabilising neighbouring Pakistan, a crucial U.S. and Saudi ally where the Islamist militant groups are also present. Taliban and Afghan officials attended an iftar, or breaking of the fast during the holy month of Ramadan, in the holy city of Mecca last month in the presence of King Abdullah.

Both Afghan parties have denied the meeting amounted to reconciliation talks, but Riyadh-based diplomats and a well-placed Saudi analyst said Riyadh was hoping to break the Taliban's link to al Qaeda for fear of Pakistan's future. 'They want to help because Pakistan is frightening. They fear what could happen in Pakistan. This (mediation) is to stabilise Pakistan,' said one diplomat privy to details of the Mecca talks who spoke on condition of anonymity.

UAE

Social Desk

UAE keen to promote future leaders : Gergawi

The UAE Government is keen to introduce a second generation of aspiring leaders, providing them with all necessary tools and expertise, said Mohammed Abdullah Al Gergawi, Minister of Cabinet Affairs.He was commenting on the UAE Government Leaders Programme that concluded its three-day session for 'Future Leaders' at Madinat Jumeirah on Tuesday.

The programme, conducted under the directives of His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, was attended by assistant directors and lower cadres of ministries and federal authorities.

Economic Desk

UAE remains a pillar of economic stability: President

At a time when the world is facing unprecedented challenges to the global economic order, the UAE leadership continues to demonstrate vision and foresight in assuring the stability of the national economy, a senior Dubai government official affirmed.

The bold statement by The President, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan provides reassurance to the people of the UAE that our economy is supported by a healthy and robust national banking system, said H.E. Nasser bin Hassan al-Shaikh, Director-General of the Dubai Department of Finance, in a statement issued on Sunday by the President on the strength of the national economy and banking system.

International Desk

Hamad Al Ka'abi becomes UAE permanent representative to IAEA

Hamad Al Ka'abi becomes UAE permanent representative to IAEA he commended the UAE leadership's wisdom and farsightedness on taking course for development of nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes to ensure future energy.

UAE, Jordan discuss the bilateral ties

Jordanian Prime Minister Nadir Al Dahabi received yesterday visiting UAE Foreign Minister H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan in the presence Jordanian Foreign Minister Salaheddin Al Bashir. Al Dahabi expressed the sincere desire of the government of Jordan to boost bilateral ties so as to meet aspirations of the UAE President H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan.

UAE reiterates commitment to keep supporting social development

The UAE has urged the international community to double its efforts in the implementation of recommendations issued by series of social development related conferences held by the United Nations with the aim of improving the living standard at the local and international levels. In a UAE statement to the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) Monira Al-Marzouqi, member of the UAE delegation at the Sixty-third General Assembly said half the

world's population lacked the simplest means of dignified living, with many of them beset by disease, suffering from illiteracy and unemployment, and victims of organised crime.

UAE leader urges Palestinian unity in talks with Abbas

The president of the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday stressed the need to heal the inter-Palestinian rift during a meeting with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, state WAM news agency reported.

Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan "expressed the hope that efforts under way to heal the rift and restore Palestinian unity will succeed," WAM said. Restoring Palestinian unity would "boost Arab and international efforts to reach a just and lasting solution that guarantees the Palestinian people's national rights" in keeping with UN resolutions, Khalifa told Abbas during the meeting in oil-rich Abu Dhabi.

Olmert and Abbas have been meeting about twice a month since the peace process was relaunched at a US conference in November. The negotiations have made little visible progress since then however, despite Olmert and Abbas's joint pledge to try to reach a full agreement by the end of 2008.

Rice cancels Abu Dhabi trip over economic crisis

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice canceled a visit to the United Arab Emirates this week to stay home and help the Bush administration tackle the financial crisis, her spokesman said on Tuesday.

Rice had been set to attend a meeting this weekend in Abu Dhabi on democracy promotion and reform in the broader Middle East region and was also expected to make a stop in Oman.

Kosovo gets UAE recognition

The United Arab Emirates yesterday recognised the independence of Kosovo, becoming the first Arab country to recognise its secession from Serbia. “The UAE declares its recognition of Kosovo as an independent sovereign state,” the official Wam news agency said. The move is in line with the UAE’s “support for peoples’ legitimate right to self-determination,” Wam said.

Jordanian minister hails bilateral relations between UAE and Jordan

Jordanian Foreign Minister Dr. Salah Al Bashir hailed the bilateral relations between UAE and Jordan, describing it distinctive.

He described the recent visit paid by UAE Foreign Minister HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Jordan as fruitful, adding that the visit was an important milestone in the march of the two countries towards more strengthened relations. Jordan and UAE signed an agreement setting up a joint ministerial committee during Sheikh Abdullah's visit.

Terrorism Desk

UAE reiterates commitment to combating terrorism

The UAE calls for all-encompassing and non-selective implementation of the General Assembly's international anti-terrorism strategy which was approved two years ago as well as for transparency and objectivity. It calls for non-discriminative boosting technical assistance and training programs offered to developing countries so as to enable governments to develop national anti-terrorism capabilities. The UAE urged for dissociating terrorism with particular religions, nationalities, cultures or ethnic groups, criminalizing all practices and that insult religions as well as instigators of those actions which promote hatred and terrorism and also called for promoting respect for the rule of law and human rights in all anti-terrorism plans and programs so as to promote effective measures against the phenomenon. The statement also called for a UN-sponsored international conference to come up with a clear and precise internationally-agreed definition of terrorism. It also called for promoting the relevant anti-terrorism legal and judicial systems which have to be non-selectively implemented. Accordingly, the statement said, differentiation must be made between terrorism and peoples' struggle against colonization and foreign occupation to regain independence and self-determination based on UN charter on human rights and relevant international laws and protocols and called the UN and its key agencies to shoulder the full responsibility for settling occupation cases and economic grievances which proved to have contributed to creating hotbeds for terrorism.

"In realization of its unwavering anti-terrorism policy, the UAE took comprehensive legal and judicial measures to combat terrorism. Among these are Law No. 1371 and Law No. 1267 as well as the anti-terrorism federal law which was enacted last July to combat terrorist acts perpetrated by individuals or groups", said Al Shemeili.

Bahrain

Social Desk

Rights body urges Bahrain to abolish death penalty

Bahrain was urged to abolish death penalty from its panel code law after the activation of the punishment few years ago. The Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society (BHRW) marked the World Day Against Death Penalty on Friday with calling Bahraini civil society to intensify efforts to pressure the government to eliminate the punishment.

We consider that the death penalty is a flagrant violation of the human right to life as it comes at the top of the Penal Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, which did not demonstrate that it is a deterrent than other penalties assessed in the Penal Code for committing the crime," member in the society, Faisal Fulad, told Khaleej Times on Saturday.

Bahraini activists demand new law to protect rights

Bahraini activists called for a national law criminalising all forms of discrimination and fair distribution of electoral districts at the Congress meet in Washington. "The Bahrain government should enforce a law which imposes stiff penalties against discrimination," said Abduljalil Al Singace from the Haqq Movement of Liberties and Democracy.

Economic Desk

Dubbing human capital as the real growth engine

Dubbing human capital as the real growth engine, the Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa yesterday said the Kingdom was investing in its true wealth – its people – combining human development and economic development on its march into the future.

"They are two wheels on the same cart – interdependent on each one and ineffective without the support of the other. Underpinning our plans for tomorrow is the central ethos that human development and economic development are inextricably linked," he said, addressing students, academicians, representatives of financial and banking sectors and intellectuals and thinkers at the Waseda University in Japan. Showcasing the Bahraini model of development, he said the Kingdom in the last few years had made changes in the way 'we operate as a nation' and was now looking firmly to the long term. "We are looking at economic diversification, stability and security and to our human rather natural resources. We are seeking further growth based not on oil but on firm foundations rooted in real productivity gains, real economic growth, real improvements in education and real skills in our labour force." "People are what we are investing in. This is why we are making changes. We are striving for individual and community fulfillment, enabling our citizens to achieve their full potential, supported in all aspects of their growth. What is the purpose of reforms if not to improve lives," he maintained.

He underscored the need for Bahrain and Japan to work together building on individual strengths and successes to foster balanced and fruitful long-term partnerships. “Partnerships that have and will bring the best results for our people.”

Bahrain public sector workers paid less

More than seventy-nine per cent of Bahrainis working in the public sector received less than BD800. The statistics of the General Organisation for Pension Fund for the first half on 2008 indicate that of total 45,144 public sector workforce, 35805 individuals received less than BD100. The statistics was released short after the announcement of the Labour Market Regularity Authority on Sunday that the average salary of public sector employee that is by BD856 is still higher than private sector that reaches BD533 in the second half of the year. The local workforce in both sectors reaches 120,823 staff and 71.7 per cent of them get less than BD800. In the private sector 18.2 per cent of staff get from BD400 to BD499 and 17.7 per cent get from BD500 to BD500, while 6.7 per cent get less than BD300.

According to a report published by the Middle East online recruitment firm Gulftalent.com, private sector salaries here in the country have risen by an average of 10.5 per cent in the last year.

International Desk

Arab nations urged to boost status to counter global crisis: Bahrain PM

Global respect of mainly economic blocs requires the Arab nation, with all the political and economic stature it has, to boost its status in the international community and assume responsibilities to protect its achievements amid fast-paced international developments, including mainly the global economic crisis, Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa asserted in a meeting with senior Bahraini officials at the Gudaibiya Palace yesterday.

Bahraini CP in Singapore to strengthen ties

Crown Prince and Economic Development Board (EDB) Chairman Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa yesterday made a visit to the Insead Business School in Singapore. He expressed pleasure with the growth and developments witnessed in the GCC amidst the competitive atmosphere that in turn achieves more growth for the people of the region.

King Hamad reaffirms support to UNESCO in Bahrain

His Majesty the King, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, received yesterday the Minister of Education and President of Bahrain National Committee for Education, Science and Culture Dr Majid bin Ali Al Nuaimi who presented to him the members of International Arbitration Committee for the unesco King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa prize for the use of information and communication.

Qatar

International Desk

Qatar sends relief plane to Kyrgyzstan

In yet another sign of Qatar's keen interest in playing international humanitarian role, a flight carrying essential material took off on Thursday for Kyrgyzstan. The aid is being extended, after a powerful earthquake, measuring 6.6 on the Richter scale, struck the densely-populated Kyrgyz areas near border with China last Sunday, causing wide-spread damage. "Our medical wing has the experience of treating the casualties and victims of earthquake," an official at the Ministry of Interior said yesterday.

Qatar, Iran review co-operation ties and international issues

HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani received yesterday at his Emiri Diwan office Dr Ali Akbar Velayati, special adviser to the Iranian leader, who called on the Emir to greet him on the occasion of his visit to Qatar to take part in the Sixth International Conference on Jerusalem. The meeting was attended by Chief of the Emiri Diwan HE Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Saud al-Thani, Director of the Emir's office HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the Emir's Secretary for Follow-up Affairs HE Saad bin Mohamed al-Rumeihi, Director of Asian and African Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Abdulrahman Mohamed al-Kholeifi and the Iranian Ambassador to Qatar. HE the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani also met Dr Velayati at his Emiri Diwan office yesterday. The two sides reviewed co-operation ties besides regional and international issues. The meeting was attended among others by Acting Director of the Prime Minister's office HE Abdullah bin Eid al-Suleiti, Director of Asian and African Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry Ambassador Abdulrahman Mohamed al-Kholeifi.

UN welcomes Qatar's mediation to solving Darfur conflict

The UN welcomes and supports the Qatari initiative to achieving a peaceful resolution for the conflict in Sudan's troubled province of Darfur, a senior UN official said here Sunday. Alain Le Roy, Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, said the UN welcomed the Qatari initiative because it backed efforts of the mediator of the UN and African Union (AU), Djibril Bassole.

Arab cmte on Darfur ends "positive" meetings in Sudan

Qatari minister of state for foreign affairs Ahmad Al-Mahmoud, chairing an Arab committee mediating between the Sudanese government and rebel movements in Darfur, said Sunday committee members held "positive" meetings with concerned parties about conflict in Darfur.

Al-Mahmoud, speaking to reporters at the airport before leaving Khartoum, said the committee would meet with all rebel movements in and outside Sudan to listen to their points of view over the conflict.He hoped the conciliation conference between Khartoum and rebel movements would be held on due time in Doha. Al-Mahmoud said the visit of the committee members to Sudan has achieved its objectives.
All officials the committee members have met voiced their desire to swiftly reach a peaceful solution for the Darfur conflict, as well as maintaining Sudanese territorial unity and safety, he said. The committee is made up of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Egypt and Qatar.

UN hails Qatar's bid for peace in Darfur

The UN welcomes and supports the Qatari initiative to achieving a peaceful resolution for the conflict in Sudan's troubled province of Darfur, a senior UN official said here on Sunday.

Qatar urged to mediate between Fatah, Hamas

Qatar has been urged to play a mediatory role between the Palestinian Fatah and Hamas movements and bring their representatives to Doha to broker a peace deal similar to the Doha accord that ended the conflict in Lebanon.

Speaking at the closing session of the sixth annual Al Quds International Forum on Monday, Sheikh Yousuf al-Qaradawi urged HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani to intervene between the Palestinian factions so that they can form a unity government.

Qatar says Darfur mediators will meet in Doha

A Qatari minister said on Tuesday that Arab and African ministers would meet in the Qatari capital to decide their next steps in mediating a peace agreement for Sudan's western Darfur region.

He told reporters after a trip to Sudan that the Sudanese government had given positive indications, but the mediators had not yet spoken to any of the Darfur rebel groups.

The Arab League has asked Qatar to arrange a Sudanese peace conference in Doha, bringing together the government and the rebels who took up arms against Khartoum in 2003.

Qatar stresses on supremacy of law at UN

Qatar has underlined its deep belief in the importance of the supremacy of law at the national and international levels and said that the most important steps to achieve such a goal is coordination between the persons concerned and its application on all parties concerned. It is also important to avoid double standards when defending supremacy of the law and the immediate condemnation of any violation of it.

This came in a statement delivered by Jassem Yacoub Yusuf Abdullah, the Second Secretary at the Foreign Ministry's Legal Affairs Department and Member Of The Permanent Mission Of The State Of Qatar participating in the 36th session of the UN General Assembly.

Qatar Emir holds talks with Eritrean president

HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki held talks at the Emiri Diwan yesterday. The talks dealt with relations between the two countries and issues of common concern.

Oman

Social Desk

Qaboos named Justice Personality of the year

The World Press, Publishing and Distribution Establishment has named His Majesty Sultan Qaboos as the “Justice and Humanity Personality for 2008”. Dr Mohammed al Turaiqi, Chairman of the Islamic World Handicap Care and Rehabilitation Council and Editor-in-Chief of Alam al Eaaqa magazine, stressed that the selection of His Majesty the Sultan was a unanimous decision of the supervisory bodies overseeing the council and the establishment, besides rehabilitation institutions.

Arab, Islamic and world personalities also voiced their support in selecting His Majesty. In a press statement, Dr Al Turaiqi said the selection of His Majesty the Sultan is in appreciation of

his wise policies stemming from the perception that “the human being is the tool and maker of development”.

He pointed out that the Saudi-based Alam Al Eaaqa monthly magazine, which is part of Dr Al Turaiqi’s institution, has published a special edition on His Majesty and the achievements realised during the past 38 years. The article said the Sultanate firmly stepped into the future under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan who transformed the country into an oasis of justice, tolerance and good neighbourliness ushering Oman into modernity thus realising unprecedented reforms.

It said His Majesty spared no effort to serve Islam, care for the Gulf and Arab peoples and build the pillar of sustainable development in the country, caring for the people, the sick, the disabled and the aged. The magazine also detailed aspects of the comprehensive development in Oman based on the deep-rooted Omani culture and traditions.

On the economic sphere, the magazine pointed out that the Sultanate is making steady strides towards achieving the goals of the development plan set by the wise leadership until 2020, particularly in areas such as tourism, services and other economic sectors. On the Sultanate’s foreign policy, it said the stance of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos draws wide appreciation worldwide and this is clearly reflected in the positive and growing contribution of the Sultanate in numerous issues and its bilateral ties globally.

High WHO praise for Oman's healthcare

The World Health Organisation has hailed the advancements made in health care in the Sultanate during the prosperous reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

A report on the WHO website pointed out that in the late 1970s, the Sultanate of Oman had only a handful of health professionals. Many people had to travel up to four days just to reach a hospital, where hundreds of patients would already be waiting in line to see one of the country’s few doctors, most of whom were expatriates.

Economic Desk

More Omanis taking up jobs in private sector

A 'charter of cooperation' adopted by Oman's private sector and labour authorities has given a fillip to the country’s drive to localise jobs, a key official said.

Sayyid Hamad bin Hilal Al Busaidy, the Manpower Ministry's Under-Secretary for Labour Affairs, noted that the number of nationals working for private sector organisations had been recording an annual increase of 12.7 per cent since 2000 and now crossed 255,000. He said the Sultanate's experience had proved to be "exemplary" among the GCC states in providing jobs for national manpower.

The charter, agreed between the ministry and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), related to amending the Labour Law to fit with the job market situation, while at the same time adhering to international labour criteria. The two sides also agreed on the private sector's need for expatriate workers whose number increased by eight per cent from 494,700 in 2000 to 925,954 in 2008.

International Desk

Omani Shura to take part in 119th parliamentary union meeting

Muscat Majlis A'Shura will take part in the 119th meeting of the International Parliamentary Union. The meeting will be held in Geneva from October 13 to 15.

In a statement, Sheikh Isaie pointed out that the participation of Shura in the meeting has a special significance as it comes after His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said approved Majlis A'Shura's membership at the International Parliamentary Union. "The meeting will provide us with the opportunity to showcase the developments made by the Sultanate in adopting democratic values, ensuring public participation in the government as well as establishing an institutional state," he added.

Plea made to waive penalties of stranded visa changers in Oman

The Philippine Embassy in Muscat, Oman, is conducting a series of meetings with the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the sultanate to discuss the possibility of waiving the fines against stranded Filipinos at Khasab in Musundam and Al Buraimi. Philippine Ambassador to Oman Akmad D. Omar recently made an official request to the Omani government to waive the penalties, particularly the fines, against the over 2,000 Filipinos from the UAE, who crossed the borders of Khasab and Al Buraimi on visa runs.

Oman becomes IPU member

The International Parliamentary Union (IPU) Council has unanimously approved Oman's Majlis Ash'shura joining the body. The approval came at the 183rd meeting of the council which began in Geneva on 13th October.

Oman, Turkey hold talks

Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed Al Rowas, His Majesty the Sultan's adviser for cultural affairs, received Professor Mohammed Aydin, minister of state and coordinator for initiative of civilisations alliance at the Turkish government, and the delegation accompanying him, currently visiting the Sultanate.

The meeting discussed a number of topics related to developing joint cooperation in a number of cultural and educational fields that concern the two friendly countries. The meeting was attended by Habib bin Mohammed Al Riyami and the Turkish ambassador to the Sultanate. During the meeting, talks were focused on the media mission through its various channels and its important role in enriching knowledge and enhancing understanding and cooperation among countries and nations within the context of peaceful co-existence among all nations.

Oman, Malaysia seek to boost media relations

Hamad bin Mohammed al Rashdi, Minister of Information, received Dato Abdulmutalib Razaq, Chairman of the Malaysian Media Prima Berhad (MPB) and his delegation. They discussed the existing media relations between the Sultanate and Malaysia and ways to promote co-operation between MPB and Oman TV in news and programmes exchange and TV production to highlight Oman media presence in areas covered by MPB channels, besides benefiting from the MPB expertise in planning, programme marketing, training, news editing and exchange of visits between programmers and experts in the two countries.

Yemen

Political Desk

Unity is the 3rd revolution and Yemen still on war against terrorism: PM

Prime Minister Ali Mujawar has described the union of Yemen, took place May 22, 1990, as the 3rd revolution in the contemporary Yemen after the revolutions of 1962 and October 1963. Mujawar said that "the Yemeni unification was regained on May 22, 1990 with the will of the

Yemeni people and it represents the most and greatest goal of the previous Yemeni revolutions."

He added that the unification came as a new case in Yemen which returned things to normal after the long term regional separation in the history of the country.

International Desk

Yemen tries nationals accused of spying for Iran

The trial began on Saturday of three Yemenis who are alleged to have spied for Iran. Three were arrested in the southern city of Aden for "illegal contact," the prosecutor told the court.

In February, the same court sentenced to death a Saudi who had been stripped of his citizenship and a Yemeni army officer, on charges of spying for Egypt. Hamad al-Dhahouk, a former Saudi soldier of Yemeni origin, and Abdul Aziz al-Hatbani, were accused of falsely informing the Egyptian embassy in Sanaa that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, with the knowledge of the Yemeni government, were financing a terror cell in Yemen for attacks on tourists in Egypt.

Saleh emphasizes the commitment of Yemen to strengthening relations with Turkey

President Ali Abdullah Saleh received here on Sunday Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Nazim Akren. President Saleh emphasized the necessity to create efficient mechanism to carry out the signed agreements between both countries in a way that enhances mutual cooperation relations, asserting the commitment of Yemen to strengthening relations with Turkey in the different fields.

Yemeni, Swedish security cooperation discussed

Minister of Interior Mutahar al-Masri held Sunday talks with Non-resident Swedish ambassador to Sana'a on aspects of security cooperation between the two countries.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

SOUTH EAST ASIA

Tatheer Sherazi

Monitoring Report

From 11 October to 17 October

Presentation: October 22, 2008

- Indonesia

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- Indonesia proposes to raise Thailand-Cambodia conflict in next ASEM Summit

- Indonesia hopes Cambodia, Thailand to exercise restraint
- Indonesian police arrest five Papuans over separatist flag

Economic Front

- EU extends GSP scheme for developing countries

- Indonesia adopts measures to offset impact of global market crisis
- Indonesia protests Vietnam over melamine contamination issue
- Ministry to push for mandatory use of biofuel

Social front

- Government to detail Bali bombers' deaths
- Indonesia bans maids' recruitment? 'Shortage of domestic workers in Kingdom'
- Labor ministers promise better migrant protection
- Report predicts chronic food shortage in E-Timor
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Political/Economic front

- Malaysia opposition pressures govt on economy
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- Anwar Calls Government to work with the Opposition
- PM to concentrate on reforms

Social Front

- India, Malaysia to sign labor pact
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- Thai troops pull back after PM's ultimatum
- Thais want peace, but also better traffic, as protests drag on
- Thailand's new PM may resign amid anti-govt protests
- Thailand PM considers resigning
- Thai military tells govt to end political crisis
- Thai court issues 5th arrest warrant for Thaksin
- Thailand extends emergency in restive south
- Thai, Cambodian ministers fail to solve border row
- Cambodia and Thailand border tensions rise
- Thailand deploys more troops to disputed area bordering Cambodia

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- Thailand: business as usual

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Political front

- Singapore very disturbed by Thai-Cambodian border situation
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- Singapore needs to balance energy demands with economic growth

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- Singapore hosts ASEAN meeting on rural development and poverty

- Survey shows more S'poreans are aware of the importance of family
- Philippine

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- Emergency assistance to Mindanao reaches P89.337 million
- New impeachment filed against Arroyo
- No threat to Arroyo in impeachment case
- Enhancing bilateral ties between Brunei, Philippines army

- 13 Muslim Rebels Dead In Philippines Military Offensive –Army
- Philippines Warns Shipping As More Crew Kidnapped Off Somalia

Economic Front

- Philippines will spend more to weather crisis: Arroyo

- Arroyo calls for summit on global risis

Political front

- Vietnam, Egypt look to stronger inspection ties
- Vietnam backs int'l efforts for Afghan peace

Social Front

- US support Vietnamese with disabilities

- Laos

Political/Geostretegic front

- Lao-Thai discuss railway running

Economic Front

- Natural disaster poses threat to the world

Social Front

- Red Cross donate relief aids to flood victims

- Lao-Thai trade volume increases by 47 percent
- Cambodia

Political front

- Cambodia warns of war after border talks

- Fighting erupts on border
- UN concern over Thai-Cambodian dispute

Economic Front

- PM to ask China for new loans
- Hun Sen warns of economic crisis effect

- UN concern over Thai-Cambodian dispute

Social Front

Summary

This week, this region is becoming more instable because of gong situation of political instability and financial cricis.Like the other regions this region is also facing the problem of financial crisis at economic level. There are also certain trade agreements between different countries. Especially Malaysia and Vietnam are becoming focal point in trade. Some Muslim countries like Egypt are also making ties with Vietnam. At political front Thailand is facing again a critical situation because of rumors of resign of new prime minister .This may be again as a result of protests going on. Thailand and Cambodia are also again at the brink of war because of the worsen condition between them and there is a great anxiety among the countries of the region to solve the issue. In Philippine there is also a fight and dozens of people are dying day by day. And there is again a case of

impeachment that is filed against president. In Malaysia Ibrahim has changed his focus from to topple the government to urge the government to face the financial cricis.

The summary of news item is as follows:

- **Indonesia**

Political front

- **Indonesia proposes to raise Thailand-Cambodia conflict in next ASEM Summit**

Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has suggested to put the issue of border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia onto the agenda of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Beijing next week.

- **Indonesia hopes Cambodia, Thailand to exercise restraint**

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono expressed the hope here on Tuesday that Cambodia and Thailand would exercise restraint and be able prevent an open conflict on the border in the spirit of Asean solidarity.

- **Indonesian police arrest five Papuans over separatist flag**

Police in Indonesia's eastern-most province of Papua, say five men have been arrested after the multiple raising of an outlawed separatist flag. The police say the outlawed "Morning Star" flag was unfurled in four places, including in front of the local assembly and government offices in Nabire town.

Economic Front

- **EU extends GSP scheme for developing countries**

The European Union extended on July 23 its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for the period from January 1, 2009 until the end of 2011. This decision will allow the EU to maintain preferential access to its market for 176 developing countries, including India, said the European Commission in a statement.

- **Indonesia adopts measures to offset impact of global market crisis**

Indonesia, the biggest Southeast Asia economy, has adopted a series of measures to offset the impact of the global market crisis.

- **Indonesia protests Vietnam over melamine contamination issue**

The Indonesian government has sent a protest to the Vietnamese government about the latter`s statement about alleged melamine-contaminated Khong Guan biscuits made in Indonesia, a food control official said.

- **Ministry to push for mandatory use of biofuel**

The Plantation Industries and Commodities Ministry will push for mandatory biodiesel use in the public transportation industry in its next meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Competitiveness of Palm Oil, following a similar implementation in Indonesia recently.

Social front

- **Government to detail Bali bombers' deaths**

INDONESIA will next week announce details about the executions of three Bali bombers, the Government said today.

- **Indonesia bans maids' recruitment? 'Shortage of domestic workers in Kingdom'**

Embassy of Indonesia in Bahrain, under orders from Jakarta, is reported to have enforced a ban on recruitment of domestic workers from that country, till investigations into the killing of a domestic maid were completed.

- **Labor ministers promise better migrant protection**

The second Asia and Europe Labor ministers concluded in Bali, Indonesia, their on Wednesday with a declaration promising to provide better protection on migrant workers, the Jakarta Post said here Thursday.

- **Report predicts chronic food shortage in E-Timor**

New figures released on World Food Day show up to 70 per cent of families in some parts of East Timor are not confident of finding enough to eat each day. Aid organization Oxfam says "food insecurity" in the East Asia and Pacific Region, is fast becoming a chronic problem, and some East Timorese families face a food shortage for up to five months of the year..

- **Indonesia charges suspected militants**

Abu Husna, Agus Purwanto and Parmin are said to be senior militants who aided top operatives from Jemaah Islamiah (JI), the group behind a series of attacks in the country including the 2002 bombings in Bali which killed more than 200 people, including 88 Australians.

- # Malaysia

Political/Economic front

- **Malaysia opposition pressures govt on economy**

Malaysia's opposition urged the government yesterday to revise the 2009 budget, review spending on mega-projects and roll out plans to deal with the effects of global financial turmoil.

Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said falling crude oil and palm oil prices and slowing demand for manufactured exports could severely cut government revenues at a time when spending is rising faster than expected.

- **Malaysia's Anwar says plan to topple government put on hold**

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said he is putting on hold his plan to topple the government through parliamentary defection.

- **Anwar Calls Government to work with the Opposition**

Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim Monday called on the government to review its big-spending 2009 budget in light of the global economic crisis.

- **PM to concentrate on reforms**

Reforms and changes can only take effect if the people are truly ready for them and this has to start with the leaders, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Social Front

- **India, Malaysia to sign labor pact**

India and Malaysia on Monday agreed to sign, within the next few months, a comprehensive memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the deployment and welfare of their respective workers in each other's domain.

- # Thailand

Political /Geostretegic front

Thai troops pull back after PM's ultimatum

THAI troops have pulled back from two flash points along the border, Cambodia military officials there say, calming fears of war after an ultimatum from Cambodia was issued Tuesday.

Prime Minister Hun Sen warned Tuesday that the presence of Thai troops in Cambodian territory would trigger "large-scale armed conflict", after the two sides failed to resolve the territorial dispute.

- **Thais want peace, but also better traffic, as protests drag on**

Despite international headlines screaming of turmoil in Thailand, many Bangkok residents see this week's violence between police and protesters as more of a traffic problem than a political one.

- **Thailand's new PM may resign amid anti-govt protests**

Thailand's embattled prime minister has indicated he may resign in the wake of fierce anti-government protests earlier this week that left two people dead and hundreds injured.

Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, who has held the job for little more than three weeks, spoke as protesters prepared for another mass rally.

Senior military leaders, who are influential in coup-prone Thailand, have put pressure on the premier to solve the crisis quickly.

- **Thailand PM considers resigning**

Thailand's embattled prime minister has indicated he may resign in the wake of fierce anti-government protests earlier this week that left two people dead and hundreds injured.

- **Thai military tells govt to end political crisis**

Thailand’s highest-ranking military officer Saturday piled pressure on the government to end political unrest in which two people were killed and hundreds injured this week

- **Thai court issues 5th arrest warrant for Thaksin**

A Thai court on Wednesday issued a fifth arrest warrant for ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra, after he failed to appear in a case accusing him of amending tax policy to enrich his business empire.

- **Thailand extends emergency in restive south**

Thailand’s government on Tuesday agreed to extend emergency rule for another three months over its Muslim-majority south, where more than 3,400 people have been killed in four years of unrest.

- **Thai, Cambodian ministers fail to solve border row**

Cambodian and Thai foreign ministers on Monday failed to solve a border dispute that recently erupted into a brief military clash.

In a statement issued after the meeting, Cambodia called for more talks to prevent further escalation after the Oct. 3 cross-border gunfight that wounded one Cambodian and two Thai soldiers.

- **Cambodia and Thailand border tensions rise**

Cambodia's prime minister warned Thailand on Monday that "armed clashes" will erupt if Thai troops continue to trespass over the border.

- **Thailand deploys more troops to disputed area bordering Cambodia**

Bangkok on Tuesday deployed more troops to a disputed area near Cambodia's ancient Preah Vihear Temple hours after Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat reiterated a pledge to resolve an ongoing border dispute with Cambodia by peaceful means. Speaking on a private television station, Lt Gen Wiboonsak Niphan, chief of Thailand's Second Army Region which is responsible for the border with Cambodia, said he had to send more troops into the conflict zone since Cambodia also deployed more soldiers.

Economic Front

- **Thailand: business as usual**

AS THAILAND reels from its worst civil unrest in 16 years, tour operators say that holidays to the troubled country will continue to depart as normal. Two protesters died and more than 400 were injured last Tuesday when police clashed with demonstrators.

Singapore

Political front

- **Singapore very disturbed by Thai-Cambodian border situation**

Responding to media queries on the exchange of fire between troops at the Thai-Cambodia border, Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the republic is very disturbed by the turn of events.

- **Bahrain's Crown Prince to visit Singapore**

The Crown Prince of Bahrain and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Bahrain Defence Force Shaikh Salman Hamad Al-Khalifa will visit Singapore from October 13 to 15 at the invitation of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

Economic Front

- **Singapore needs to balance energy demands with economic growth**

A long-term challenge to Singapore will be balancing energy demands with economic growth. Trade and Industry Minister Lim Hng Kiang said in a speech on Monday that growth in Asia has raised energy consumption demands and carbon emissions.

- **Singapore in better shape compared to last financial crisis**

Singapore may have slipped into a technical recession, but Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry S Iswaran said the country is in a better shape compared to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997.

H

Social Front

- **Singapore hosts ASEAN meeting on rural development and poverty**

Singapore has hosted the 6th ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty (SOMRDPE), and the grouping's first "SOMRDPE + 3" meeting with China, Japan and Korea.

- **Survey shows more S'poreans are aware of the importance of family**

More people are now aware of the importance of family, according to a survey of 1,200 people that was conducted after the National Family Week celebrations which ended in June 2008. Three in 10 people surveyed said they now make more effort to give their families top priority in their lives.

• Philippine

Political Social / front

- **Emergency assistance to Mindanao reaches P89.337 million**

The Philippine government, the United Nations (UN) and private sectors poured in a total of P89,337,869.64 as emergency assistance for the people in Central Mindanao displaced in the renewed fighting between government forces and Muslim rebels in Central Mindanao as of Sept. 21 this year, according to the National Disaster Coordinating Center (NDCC).

- **New impeachment filed against Arroyo**

Opposition groups in the Philippines filed an impeachment complaint against President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo yesterday, but admitted they did not have the numbers in Congress to make it stick.

Arroyo has fended off three impeachment complaints in each of the past three years with her domination of the House of Representatives. The complaint accuses Arroyo of corruption, extra-judicial killings, torture and illegal arrests. One of the complainants is a woman whose activist son has been missing for 18 months and is widely suspected to have been abducted by security forces.

- **No threat to Arroyo in impeachment case**

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- **Enhancing bilateral ties between Brunei, Philippines army**

The mutual respect and excellent bilateral ties between Brunei Darussalam and the Republic of the Philippines were further enhanced yesterday morning when the Commander of Royal Brunei Armed Forces, Pehin Datu Lailaraja Major General Dato Paduka Seri Hj Awang Halbi bin Hj Md Yussof received a courtesy call from the Chief of Staff of the Philippines Armed Forces,

- **13 Muslim Rebels Dead In Philippines Military Offensive –Army**

Thirteen Muslim rebels have been killed in a two- day military offensive on the southern Philippines island of Mindanao, the army said Thursday.

- **Philippines Warns Shipping As More Crew Kidnapped Off Somalia**

The vice-president of the Philippines on Thursday confirmed the hijacking of a Filipino-staffed ship off Somalia and appealed to shipping companies to sail within areas patrolled by a multinational coalition.

Economic Front

- **Philippines will spend more to weather crisis: Arroyo**

MANILA: Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said yesterday that her government will spend more to stimulate the economy and protect growth as the world braces for the worst financial turmoil in 80 years.

- **Arroyo calls for summit on global risis**

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo yesterday called on Southeast Asian neighbours and partners to meet next week and devise a plan to cushion the region from the impact of the global financial crisis.

Political front

- **Vietnam, Egypt look to stronger inspection ties**

Inspectors of Vietnam and Egypt have agreed to increase the exchange of experiences and information to reinforce the fight against crimes and to ensure healthy operations of their societies and state apparatuses.

- **Vietnam backs int'l efforts for Afghan peace**

Vietnam will continue contributing to concerted efforts by the UN and the international community to help Afghanistan fulfill its target of long-term peace, stability and development,

Economic Front

Social Front

- **US support Vietnamese with disabilities**

The US government, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided over 2.6 million USD to extend two projects that aim to assist people with disabilities throughout Vietnamese society.

Laos

Political/Geostretegic front

- **Lao-Thai discuss railway running**

Representatives of Laos and Thailand met this week in Nongkai province, Thailand, on running railway between Vientiane of Laos and Nongkai in Thailand, which is 3.5 km long.

Economic Front

- **Natural disaster poses threat to the world**

Laos is a country considerably suffered from natural disaster over the past 30 years such as flood, drought, fire, storms and disease epidemic, said Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Welfare Laoly Faiphengyoua.

Social Front

- **Red Cross donate relief aids to flood victims**

President of Lao Red Cross Dr Snivourat Saramany and a representative of International Red Cross on 11 October donated 120 tonnes of rice and consumer?s goods to people in 11 villages, who have been suffered from flood in August.The handover of relief aids was held last week in Thoulakhom district, Vientiane province. Mr Phoutdavanh Chandala, Deputy Chief of Thoulakhom district, received the package from the Head of the Lao Red Cross.

- **Lao-Thai trade volume increases by 47 percent**

Trade volume between Laos and Thailand reached more than 1.6 billion USD during the first eight months of the year, an increase of almost 47 percent over the previous period. Exports from Laos to Thailand stood at 420 million USD, a year-on-year rise of 55.2 percent.

Cambodia

Political front

Cambodia warns of war after border talks

Thailand given ultimatum to remove its troops from the Kingdom's territory or risk sparking a 'full-scale armed conflict', PM says

- **Fighting erupts on border**

Cambodian and Thai troops open fire on each other with small arms and artillery as tensions in disputed territory near Preah Vihear temple boil over

A Cambodian soldier stands guard over 10 Thai troops captured during heavy clashes Wednesday on the border near Preah Vihear temple.

- **UN concern over Thai-Cambodian dispute**

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed deep concern about a recent clash on the Thai-Cambodian border, which reportedly claimed two lives. He urged both sides to show restraint and negotiate a peaceful resolution, the Secretary-General spokesman said.

Economic Front

- **PM to ask China for new loans**

Prime Minister Hun Sen announced plans to borrow upwards of US$300 million from the Chinese government during his trip to Beijing later this month. "We need some hundreds of millions ... $300 million is a small amount for China," Hun Sen said during the opening of the fourth Asia Economic Forum in Phnom Penh on Tuesday.

- **Hun Sen warns of economic crisis effect**

WITH the economic crisis spreading through Asian economies, Prime Minister Hun Sen urged international cooperation and government action to prevent a property market crash from dragging down the Cambodian economy.

- **UN concern over Thai-Cambodian dispute**

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Social Front

- **Development blamed for floods**

Residents say the filling in of Phnom Penh's drainage lakes is putting the city underwater

A woman pulls a cart with her children past a flooded area. PHNOM Penh residents and local officials have lashed out at large-scale development companies, saying that the filling in of city overflow ponds and lakes is causing widespread flooding throughout the city.

Detailed Monitoring Report

Indonesia

Political front

- **Indonesia proposes to raise Thailand-Cambodia conflict in next ASEM Summit**

Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has suggested to put the issue of border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia onto the agenda of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Beijing next week.

The suggestion was made following the rising tension between the two countries in the border, which on Wednesday turned to counter shooting between their soldiers.

"With the rising tension in the border, the president proposes to bring the issue on the ASEM summit," said Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda.

At the beginning of this month, soldiers from the two countries exchanged fire at the disputed area, injuring several of them, while two Thai para-military rangers lost their legs after stepping on landmines there. Preah Vihear Temple, known as Phra Viharn in Thailand, was named a World Heritage Site at a UNESCO meeting in Quebec, Canada this year despite Thai opposition to the listing. The ancient Hindu temple, sits on a 525-metre-high cliff on the Dangrek Mountain range that defines the Thai-Cambodian border, has been the source of sovereignty dispute for decades.

- **Indonesia hopes Cambodia, Thailand to exercise restraint**

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono expressed the hope here on Tuesday that Cambodia and Thailand would exercise restraint and be able prevent an open conflict on the border in the spirit of Asean solidarity.

He made the statement upon arrival at the Halim Perdanakusumah from visiting East Java after receiving a report from foreign minister Hassan Wirajuda that the situation on the border between Cambodia and Thailand was tense again and open to the possibility of a military conflict.
According to him Prime Minister Hun Sen said a worse situation could be prevented because Cambodia also wanted to settle the problem peacefully through bilateral negotiations with Thailand."It was also mentioned that tomorrow (15/10) there will be a working group meeting to discuss the conflict," he said.

President Yudhoyono said Hun Sen had assured him he would prevent the situation from escalating and settle it peacefully with Thailand." I have also called Thai Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat to convey my worries because if the conflict continues it will become worse. Moreover, now when we are still concerned with overcoming the financial crisis," he said. He said the Thai prime minister also said that he had a strong will to settle the conflict peacefully. On October 21, he said, the two countries would also hold a more substantive formal meeting to seek a peaceful solution of the problem.

Due to the latest development Thai Prime Minister Sochai Wongsawat had cancelled his plan to visit Indonesia on October 22 and had assigned his foreign minister to come to Indonesia.
The tension escalated in July after the temple was declared a world heritage belonging to Cambodia by the UNESCO, angering Thai nationalists who still consider it their country's. The situation led to a military tension with around 1,000 Cambodian and Thailand soldiers facing each other for six weeks before the two sides later in August promised to withdraw.

- **Indonesian police arrest five Papuans over separatist flag**

Police in Indonesia's eastern-most province of Papua, say five men have been arrested after the multiple raising of an outlawed separatist flag. The police say the outlawed "Morning Star" flag was unfurled in four places, including in front of the local assembly and government offices in Nabire town.
Anyone convicted of displaying separatist symbols faces a maximum of life in prison in Indonesia

Economic Front

- **EU extends GSP scheme for developing countries**

The European Union extended on July 23 its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for the period from January 1, 2009 until the end of 2011. This decision will allow the EU to maintain preferential access to its market for 176 developing countries, including India, said the European Commission in a statement. MD-90 plane operated by Indonesia's Lion Air was grounded after a three-metre-long component of the aircraft was found on a runway; an official told local media December 6. Heri Bakti, the head administrator of Jakarta's Sukarno- Hatta airport was cited by local media as saying, "Lion Air has admitted that the part belongs to one of its aircraft.

The EU banned 51 Indonesian commercial and charter carriers, including national airline Garuda Indonesia, as well as cargo planes from its air space last June. The ban was imposed after the crash landing of a Garuda plane in Yogyakarta, Central Java, in March that killed 21 people, and the death of 102 people aboard an Adam Air jet that plunged into the sea in central Indonesia in January. Along with the EU, the United States has also sanctioned Indonesia's aviation industry for not meeting international safety standards, especially in its growing budget airline market. Measures that as it seems have not fully satisfied the EU, which sent a monitoring mission few weeks ago.

- **Indonesia adopts measures to offset impact of global market crisis**

Indonesia, the biggest Southeast Asia economy, has adopted a series of measures to offset the impact of the global market crisis.

In a bid restore the confidence in the stock market, the country's capital market watchdog, or Bapepam, plans to relax its regulation and allows listed firms to buy back shares without shareholder approval, the acting chairman of Bapepam Darmin Nasution has said.

Under the current rules, the listed firms must seek shareholder approval for a buyback and an extraordinary meeting must be notified one month in advance. The stock market has suspended trading since Wednesday after the Jakarta Composite Index slumped to more than 10 percent, then skidded to more than 20 percent this week, causing panic

selling, amid the plunge of global stock market in the United States, Europe and Asia. The listed-state owned companies have a total market value of more than 30 billion U.S. dollars, or about 30 percent of the total market capitalization in the Indonesia stock exchange.

The country's central bank on Tuesday for the six time this year raised its benchmark interest rate by 25 basis points to 9.5 percent to slow inflation. Indonesia has revised down its economic growth target from 6.4 percent to 6 percent.

- **Indonesia protests Vietnam over melamine contamination issue**

The Indonesian government has sent a protest to the Vietnamese government about the latter`s statement about alleged melamine-contaminated Khong Guan biscuits made in Indonesia, a food control official said."Today, we sent the written protest to Vietnamese government through the Indonesian embassy in Hanoi with copies to the Trade Ministry. The ministry should also send a protest because according to the results of our own tests, the product is not contaminated with melamine," the head of the Food and Drug Monitoring Agency (BPOM), Husniah Rubiana Thamrin Akib, said here Monday.

"Earlier, the Vietnam government had said it would change its statement after we have submitted the results of our tests. This is strange, what is going on here," she added. The government had also questioned the reasons for the Vietnamese government to examine Indonesian food products for melamine content.

The letter from the Vietnamese government was received not long after the issue of melamine-contaminated Chinese dairy products arose. Last September, milk produced in China was reported to be contaminated with melamine. In China it killed four babies due to kidney failure and caused thousands to be hospitalized. In Indonesia, six out of 19 Chinese dairy products registered with BPOM had proven to contain melamine. Indonesia stepping up cooperation in information with China, ASEAN.

- **Ministry to push for mandatory use of biofuel**

The Plantation Industries and Commodities Ministry will push for mandatory biodiesel use in the public transportation industry in its next meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Competitiveness of Palm Oil, following a similar implementation in Indonesia recently.

Minister Datuk Peter Chin said the ministry would first introduce the use of B5 biodiesel in the transportation industry before gradually moving to other industries.“We reckon that about 500,000 tonnes of B5 biodiesel could be used in this sector every year,” he told reporters after the opening of the IRRDB International Natural Rubber Conference 2008Biodiesel B5 is a biofuel blend of 5% processed palm oil and 95% diesel.

Currently, crude palm oil (CPO) is overstocked by 1.9 million tonnes monthly. “We hope to bring down the monthly overstock level to 1.5 million tonnes and below,” Chin said.As part of strategies to reduce overall monthly overstock of CPO, he said the ministry had increased the export quota to 3 million tonnes per annum from 2 million tonnes previously,

Although overall demand for CPO was expected to drop during the current financial crisis, Chin insisted that there would still be demand from markets such as China.On the CPO price, he said: “I don’t foresee the price coming down too much.

Social front

- **Government to detail Bali bombers' deaths**

INDONESIA will next week announce details about the executions of three Bali bombers, the Government said today.

A spokesman for Indonesia's Attorney General Hendarman Supandji said there were "no obstacles" to prevent the executions from proceeding. The Attorney General's office would give details of the executions on October 24, spokesman Jasman Pandjaitan said. "Basically, there's no obstacles," he said."Even so, there are some preparations needed. "We have to coordinate with the firing squad, the executor and other related parties like the prison and its officers."

Indonesia does not normally make public the timing and locations of executions, raising speculation that the statement on Friday next week could be to announce the bombers have been put to death.

The bombers have exhausted all legal options, although their lawyers have launched a side challenge in Indonesia's Constitutional Court arguing that execution by firing squad amounts to torture.

- **Indonesia bans maids’ recruitment? ‘Shortage of domestic workers in Kingdom’**

Embassy of Indonesia in Bahrain, under orders from Jakarta, is reported to have enforced a ban on recruitment of domestic workers from that country, till investigations into the killing of a domestic maid were completed.

Agencies recruiting domestic workers, however, are complaining that the ban has resulted in a shortage of domestic workers’ supply.

The agencies are flooded with requests from people for Indonesian domestics, but the ban has put a damper on the supply. Agencies are also feeling the heat of the ban, according to recruiters.

An Indonesian maid was allegedly murdered by her employer. She is alleged to have been strangled, according to witnesses who saw him put her in his car. She was then taken to Sitra beach and thrown there.

The Supreme Court is still investigating the motive behind the murder. The first hospital report had stated that the maid died after being strangled with her scarf but the murderer had a different story.

The final medical report will confirm the motive. There are rumors that the victim was pregnant. Some claim she was sexually abused.

- **Labor ministers promise better migrant protection**

The second Asia and Europe Labor ministers concluded in Bali, Indonesia, their on Wednesday with a declaration promising to provide better protection on migrant workers, the Jakarta Post said here Thursday.

The ministers had discussed for two days issues on migrant workers at the second Labor and Employment Ministers Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Bali, Indonesia.

Although the declaration lacked details, representatives from participating countries, including China's Vice-Minister of Human Resources and Social security, Hu Xiaoyi, and the European Union representative Gilles De Robien of France, agreed it was a major step in economic relations between the two regions, especially given the recent global financial turmoil.

Eighteen labor ministers, nine ambassadors and scores of senior officials from Asia and Europe took part in the meeting.

Asia and Europe account for 60 percent of the world's population, 50 percent of the world's gross domestic product and 60 percent.

- **Report predicts chronic food shortage in E-Timor**

New figures released on World Food Day show up to 70 per cent of families in some parts of East Timor are not confident of finding enough to eat each day. Aid organization Oxfam says "food insecurity" in the East Asia and Pacific Region, is fast becoming a chronic problem, and some East Timorese families face a food shortage for up to five months of the year.

The survey also found some children in the Solomon Islands are getting just one small meal and green coconuts each day.

Oxfam Australia executive director, Andrew Hewett, says one part of the solution is getting emergency food aid into problem areas.
"But it's also to rethink our investment in agriculture," he said.” It’s to give it a greater level of priority; it's to recognize that we need to rethink the ways in which we've done agricultural development. "That's how we can get a sustainable improvement in the situation.

- **Indonesia charges suspected militants**

Abu Husna, Agus Purwanto and Parmin are said to be senior militants who aided top operatives from Jemaah Islamiah (JI), the group behind a series of attacks in the country including the 2002 bombings in Bali which killed more than 200 people, including 88 Australians.

Malaysia

Political/Economic front

- **Malaysia opposition pressures govt on economy**

Malaysia’s opposition urged the government yesterday to revise the 2009 budget, review spending on mega-projects and roll out plans to deal with the effects of global financial turmoil.

Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said falling crude oil and palm oil prices and slowing demand for manufactured exports could severely cut government revenues at a time when spending is rising faster than expected.

“Any responsible government will consider to at least introduce a revised budget,” Anwar said in his first speech in parliament since his convictions for sodomy and corruption in the late 1990s.

The government presented the budget in late August just as the global financial system was breaking down. “The opposition’s move to question and possibly delay the budget raised further policy risks in Malaysia. The government needs to get the budget approved before the end of this year. The expansionary budget featured a number of populist steps following the government’s electoral debacle in polls last March, including tax cuts, higher pension payments, andbns of dollars to improve food security and rural infrastructure.
The government forecast for 2009 is for a budget deficit of 3.6% of GDP

- **Malaysia's Anwar says plan to topple government put on hold**

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said he is putting on hold his plan to topple the government through parliamentary defection.

Instead, he wants to focus on bolstering the economy amid the global financial turmoil. Addressing the lower house for the first time as opposition chief, Anwar Ibrahim arrived at the Parliament House over an hour late. Topping his agenda was the debate on the 2009 budget unveiled by Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi last August.

The 61-year-old demanded that the government revise the budget, saying that the economic numbers and targets have become outdated.

Speaking later at a news conference, Mr Anwar denied that he has set a new deadline to seize power by December 8. He said there are more pressing issues to attend to, such as how to cushion the impact of a global economic crisis.

A former finance minister, the opposition chief has raised concerns over a yawning budget deficit, worsening inflation and job losses in the country. The UMNO-led government, he claimed, is so preoccupied with its internal politics that it is neglecting the economy.

Prime Minister Abdullah has downplayed the risk of Malaysia slipping into a recession. He said the country will have no problem in weathering the economic storm with its strong fundamentals.

- **Anwar Calls Government to work with the Opposition**

Malaysia's opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim Monday called on the government to review its big-spending 2009 budget in light of the global economic crisis.

The former Finance Minister, who is trying to unseat the coalition led by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, rubbished the premier's positive outlook on the economy.

"My concern is they are still in a state of denial. A responsible position would be to say, okay, we are having this crisis, it may come to recession, it may not come to recession, but we have to handle it," he said.

In August Abdullah unveiled a budget packed with tax cuts and sweeteners in a bid to bolster support for the beleaguered coalition and spur growth in the face of the looming slowdown.

Anwar said any responsible government would overhaul the budget and make new plans based on the changed global environment, and called on the government to work with the opposition.

As neighbouring Singapore slipped into a technical recession, Abdullah said Malaysia's fundamentals were strong and that it would be able to ride out the crisis. "We have very strong reserves, our surplus is still strong, our domestic savings are also very high and our currency is also stable and not subject to fluctuation," he told reporters Monday.

- **PM to concentrate on reforms**

Reforms and changes can only take effect if the people are truly ready for them and this has to start with the leaders, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He said that reforms and changes that are desired or talked about include the laws as well as within Barisan Nasional parties.In his speech at the opening of the Gerakan National Delegates Conference here, Abdullah who is Barisan chairman, however expressed concern.However, he cautioned that this is not going to be easy because the present state in the country with strong racial and religious sentiment is a great challenge.Abdullah said the Barisan convention to be held next year would determine their future course.

Abdullah also reiterated that the 2004 Election Manifesto with its promise of reforms was meant to be carried out throughout the second phase of implementations to achieve Vision 2020.

Later when asked if his early departure as Prime Minister would now resolve political uncertainties in the country, he said: "I hope so, I always want to see everything settled and back to being peaceful. If whatever I have done contributes to that I am happy; if it doesn't what can I do?"On whether he would repeal the Internal Security Act as a legacy of his premiership, he said: "Don't talk anything about my legacy please. I am not here to talk about legacies for me. The matter (ISA) is something that requires careful study," said Abdullah, who wants to concentrate on his reforms.

Social Front

- **India, Malaysia to sign labor pact**

India and Malaysia on Monday agreed to sign, within the next few months, a comprehensive memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the deployment and welfare of their respective workers in each other's domain.

Asked whether all contentious issues, such as a baseline wage-norm for the Indian labour force in Malaysia, were now resolved, he said "technical" details and modalities would be determined by the proposed Joint Working Group. The MoU would only reflect the policy direction, he indicated, without elaborating. Within this context, Malaysia would now appoint a Labour Attaché at its mission in Chennai to facilitate the passage of Indian workers to his country, Dr. Subramanian said.

Thailand

Political /Geostretegic front

Thai troops pull back after PM's ultimatum

THAI troops have pulled back from two flash points along the border, Cambodia military officials there say, calming fears of war after an ultimatum from Cambodia was issued Tuesday.

Prime Minister Hun Sen warned Tuesday that the presence of Thai troops in Cambodian territory would trigger "large-scale armed conflict", after the two sides failed to resolve the territorial dispute.

Hun Sen said Thailand had until noon Tuesday to withdraw its troops before the border turned into a "battle zone".

"The situation is calmer now that they have gone, but we do not know what is going to happen next and we are waiting to see how the situation evolves," Chea Saran said. "We are still on alert," he added.

- **Thais want peace, but also better traffic, as protests drag on**

Despite international headlines screaming of turmoil in Thailand, many Bangkok residents see this week's violence between police and protesters as more of a traffic problem than a political one.

In a country that has seen 18 coups since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, the clashes were treated with concern and sadness, but the sprawling capital mostly carried on as if nothing was amiss."Politics in Thailand is not stable," shrugged an unconcerned commuter on the ultra-modern light railway who would not give his full name.

Two people were killed and more than 470 injured when police clashed with thousands of anti-government protesters who stormed parliament on Tuesday.As with previous political violence at nearby Government House this year, the fallout was localised. "The first factor is the traffic for the people who work in that area," said Sinisa Lungrung, 32, who works in marketing. "The factor is the uncertainty that affects people's lives."

Tong said he was worried the violence would spread, with average Thais getting caught between the police and the PAD, which he called "a little group no good for Thailand."

The PAD allege the current People Power Party government is acting as proxy for ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted in a 2006 coup and lives in self-imposed exile in England.

- **Thailand's new PM may resign amid anti-govt protests**

Thailand's embattled prime minister has indicated he may resign in the wake of fierce anti-government protests earlier this week that left two people dead and hundreds injured.

Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, who has held the job for little more than three weeks, spoke as protesters prepared for another mass rally.

Senior military leaders, who are influential in coup-prone Thailand, have put pressure on the premier to solve the crisis quickly.

Supreme Commander General Songkitti Jaggabatara, the kingdom's highest-ranking military officer, said he had consulted the heads of the army, navy and air force, which he oversees.

"We have held consultations between the three armed forces. I have told the government to solve the problem," Mr Songkitti told reporters."As of now there is no coup, it's not time for the military to come out," said Songkitti, whose role is largely ceremonial.

- **Thailand PM considers resigning**

Thailand's embattled prime minister has indicated he may resign in the wake of fierce anti-government protests earlier this week that left two people dead and hundreds injured.

Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat has held the job for little more than three weeks. He told reporters on Saturday he's considering his position as protesters prepared for another mass rally.He says he must consider what's best in both the short and long term, such as dissolving the House or resignation. Mr Somchai was put under extra pressure on Friday when the Thai military chief told the government to solve the political crisis.The People's Alliance for Democracy, an anti-government group leading months of protests, claim the current government is running the country on behalf of Thaksin Shinawatra, who was toppled in a September 2006 coup following similar protests.

- **Thai military tells govt to end political crisis**

Thailand’s highest-ranking military officer Saturday piled pressure on the government to end political unrest in which two people were killed and hundreds injured this week.

Supreme Commander General Songkitti Jaggabatara, who oversees the army, navy and air force, said he had instructed the government to solve the country’s political crisis, ruling out any immediate military action. “We have held consultations between the three armed forces. I have told the government to solve the problem,” he told reporters

Saturday. “As of now there is no coup, it’s not time for the military to come out,” said Songkitti, whose role is largely ceremonial.

Thousands of the group’s supporters marched to parliament on Tuesday where Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat - Thaksin’s brother-in-law - was delivering his first policy address. Bloody clashes that followed between the protesters and police left two dead and at least 478 people injured in the worst street violence in Bangkok in 16 years.

Somchai has since announced an independent investigation into the incident, but army chief General Anupong Paojinda said Friday the government must “take responsibility.” “It must investigate how things went wrong after it issued the order (for police to disperse crowds) and then consult among themselves how to take responsibility,” Anupong told Thailand’s Channel 3 television.

- **Thai court issues 5th arrest warrant for Thaksin**

A Thai court on Wednesday issued a fifth arrest warrant for ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra, after he failed to appear in a case accusing him of amending tax policy to enrich his business empire.

Thaksin fled to Britain with his family in August and is seeking political asylum, arguing that he would not get a fair trial on the corruption charges mounting against him here, but prosecutors have forged ahead with the case. "The defendant failed to appear before the court without informing us," Supreme Court judge Pongphet Vichitchonchai said.

"It shows his intention to escape (the charges). The court has decided to issue an arrest warrant against him." As there was no indication of when Thaksin planned to return to his homeland, the court also temporarily suspended the case. The case is related to Advanced Info Service (AIS), one of Thailand's biggest mobile phone operators and a subsidiary of Shin Corp, the telecoms giant founded by Thaksin. An anti-corruption body set up by the junta which overthrew Thaksin in September 2006 has accused the former premier of changing a telecoms concession fee into an excise tax in 2003, saving AIS money in a concessions deal.

- **Thailand extends emergency in restive south**

Thailand’s government on Tuesday agreed to extend emergency rule for another three months over its Muslim-majority south, where more than 3,400 people have been killed in four years of unrest.

Government spokesman Natthawut Saikua told reporters emergency rule was necessary for the policing of the region. “The cabinet has agreed to extend emergency rule in three southern provinces for another three months from October 20 to January 19 next year,” Natthawut said. “The emergency rule is still needed there to allow law enforcement officials to do their job.”

- **Thai, Cambodian ministers fail to solve border row**

Cambodian and Thai foreign ministers on Monday failed to solve a border dispute that recently erupted into a brief military clash.

In a statement issued after the meeting, Cambodia called for more talks to prevent further escalation after the Oct. 3 cross-border gunfight that wounded one Cambodian and two Thai soldiers.

Foreign Minister Hor Namhong met for two hours with Thai Foreign Minister Sompong Amornwiwat in the first high-level encounter since the gunfight.

The shooting occurred in a disputed border area several miles (kilometers) west of Cambodia's ancient Preah Vihear temple.

Both sides claimed the other fired first and blamed each other for being on the wrong side of the border.In the statement, Cambodia's Foreign Ministry proposed more talks to settle the border issues peacefully "to avoid further unwarranted hostilities."

- **Cambodia and Thailand border tensions rise**

Cambodia's prime minister warned Thailand on Monday that "armed clashes" will erupt if Thai troops continue to trespass over the border.

Prime Minister Hun Sen's comments came after he met Thailand's foreign minister in the latest effort to ease tensions over a territorial dispute that earlier this month sparked a brief exchange of gunfire at the border."We told them that if they do not stop (trespassing), armed clashes will break out," Hun Sen told reporters.

Thailand's Foreign Minister Sompong Amornwiwat did not immediately comment after the meeting.Last week, two Thai soldiers were injured by land mines along the border. Thailand says the soldiers were on the Thai side of the border, but Cambodia has accused them of overstepping the boundary at a point kilometres west of the ancient Preah Vihear temple.The area - known as Eagle Field - could become "a life-and-death battle ground", Hun Sen said, adding that Thai soldiers are now camped there about 33m from Cambodian troops.Three days before that incident, at a point a few hundred metres away, a gunfight broke out between soldiers from the two sides. One Cambodian and two Thai soldiers were wounded.

Both countries have long claimed Preah Vihear, but the World Court awarded it to Cambodia in 1962. Sovereignty over some of the land around the temple, however, has not been clearly resolved.

Tensions flared July 15 after UNESCO, the UN agency, approved Cambodia's bid to have the Preah Vihear temple named a World Heritage Site. Both sides deployed troops to the border.

- **Thailand deploys more troops to disputed area bordering Cambodia**

Bangkok on Tuesday deployed more troops to a disputed area near Cambodia's ancient Preah Vihear Temple hours after Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat reiterated a pledge to resolve an ongoing border dispute with Cambodia by peaceful means. Speaking on a private television station, Lt Gen Wiboonsak Niphan, chief of Thailand's Second Army Region which is responsible for the border with Cambodia, said he had to send more troops into the conflict zone since Cambodia also deployed more soldiers.

The confrontation emerged Monday as some 20 Thai soldiers patrolled the western part of the Preah Vihear Temple where Cambodian forces tried to push the Thai troops back, according to Wiboonsak, who added that the standoff was resolved Tuesday morning after troops of both countries retreated from the area known as Eagle's Field. Tensions have been on the rise since troops from both countries have been in close proximity to each other in recent months, Wiboonsak said, without elaborating on the numbers of troops in the area.

Economic Front

- **Thailand: business as usual**

AS THAILAND reels from its worst civil unrest in 16 years, tour operators say that holidays to the troubled country will continue to depart as normal. Two protesters died and more than 400 were injured last Tuesday when police clashed with demonstrators.

"The political situation in Thailand is very uncertain," says the Foreign Office (FO). "There have been major political demonstrations in central Bangkok and ... outbreaks of violence. There remains the possibility of further violent clashes."

As operators warned that "normal booking conditions" would apply until the FO advised against travel to the country, the Thai tourism authority rushed to reassure travellers. "These incidents are limited to Bangkok's administrative centre," it said. "Key tourist sites are completely unaffected."

Social Front

Singapore

Political front

- **Singapore very disturbed by Thai-Cambodian border situation**

Responding to media queries on the exchange of fire between troops at the Thai-Cambodia border, Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the republic is very disturbed by the turn of events.

A ministry spokesman said Singapore reiterated its call for both parties to exercise utmost restraint in the broader interests of the region, and urged both sides to resolve their differences through further negotiations. Thai and Cambodian troops exchanged fire along the border on Wednesday, killing two Cambodian soldiers, as a dispute over land near an ancient temple turned deadly.

Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong said that two of his country's soldiers were killed and two others wounded in the clashes, which erupted sporadically for more than two hours before tapering off.

Gunfights broke out in the afternoon in a number of small patches of disputed land just a few kilometers away from the 11th century Preah Vihear temple, a UN World Heritage site which is on Cambodian territory.

- **Bahrain's Crown Prince to visit Singapore**

The Crown Prince of Bahrain and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Bahrain Defence Force Shaikh Salman Hamad Al-Khalifa will visit Singapore from October 13 to 15 at the invitation of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

The Crown Prince will be accompanied by his Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa and a delegation of senior officials. During the visit, the Crown Prince will call on President S.R. Nathan and Mr Lee. He will also meet with Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew.

Economic Front

- **Singapore needs to balance energy demands with economic growth**

A long-term challenge to Singapore will be balancing energy demands with economic growth. Trade and Industry Minister Lim Hng Kiang said in a speech on Monday that growth in Asia has raised energy consumption demands and carbon emissions.

He said the challenge for the government is to balance economic growth and competitiveness with managing the impact on environment.

Given that alternative energy options like wind and hydroelectric power are not available to Singapore, other solutions need to be explored. Solar energy, for the moment, is still considered to be too costly. He also said that diversified energy sources are needed to protect the country from price and supply fluctuations, and to ensure continued economic growth. "It is in such a context that we have to promote energy efficiency and

conservation efforts, introduce competition and contestability in our energy and electricity markets, and build up our energy industry, especially in the areas of trading infrastructure and research and development," said Mr Lim.

- **Singapore in better shape compared to last financial crisis**

Singapore may have slipped into a technical recession, but Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry S Iswaran said the country is in a better shape compared to the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997.

He made this point to reporters at the end of the Global Indian Diaspora Conference on Saturday.
"The Asian Financial Crisis was an important catalyst for tightening up the financial systems in our part of the world... Not just the financial systems, but corporate sector in terms of the level of debt it took on and how it structured its balance sheet," Mr Iswaran said.

He said the meeting is a platform for both governments and business leaders to network, and to ride out the storm together. While the current turmoil may dampen investments, the sentiment from delegates is that the networking and relationships forged will facilitate longer term business and economic growth.

Over 700 participants from 20 countries attended the meeting which was held for the first time outside India in Asia.

Social Front

- **Singapore hosts ASEAN meeting on rural development and poverty**

Singapore has hosted the 6th ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty (SOMRDPE), and the grouping's first "SOMRDPE + 3" meeting with China, Japan and Korea.

The 6th SOMRDPE meeting was opened on Monday by Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, who stressed that narrowing the development gap in the region is important to ASEAN's integration. The meeting, held on October 13 to 14, reviewed and discussed activities by member countries aimed at eradicating poverty. On the "SOMRDPE + 3" level, the countries on Wednesday discussed joint projects which could be taken further, addressing issues such as poverty among socially vulnerable groups.

The meeting will be held at the ministerial level in Hanoi next year, while the 7th senior officials meeting is scheduled for 2010 in Thailand, followed immediately by the second "SOMRDPE + 3" meeting with China, Japan and Korea.

- **Survey shows more S'poreans are aware of the importance of family**

More people are now aware of the importance of family, according to a survey of 1,200 people that was conducted after the National Family Week celebrations which ended in June 2008. Three in 10 people surveyed said they now make more effort to give their families top priority in their lives. The National Family Council (NFC) also found that increased awareness of its activities had an impact on attitudes. As a result, one in four showed more care towards their families.

This year's celebration was the largest in terms of public participation and community support.
More than 260,000 people participated in 350 programmes during the five-week long celebrations. This was a 72 per cent increase in participation. The council said spreading the message about work-life balance is one of the key areas it is focusing on. Clearly, we want to meet the parenting needs of young families and we want to make family the leadership value, and the last area that we want to look at is really at strengthening the foundation for our teenagers." "I think all in all, if we can deliver all that, it would have been very successful in helping Singapore build resilient families, making it a great place for families and children."

Philippine

Political Social / front

- **Emergency assistance to Mindanao reaches P89.337 million**

The Philippine government, the United Nations (UN) and private sectors poured in a total of P89,337,869.64 as emergency assistance for the people in Central Mindanao displaced in the renewed fighting between government forces and Muslim rebels in Central Mindanao as of Sept. 21 this year, according to the National Disaster Coordinating Center (NDCC).

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) headed by Secretary Esperanza Cabral chipped in the biggest assistance amounting to P16,758,966.37 used to purchase food, clothing, blankets, mosquito nets and other necessities.

The UN World Food Program (WFP) contributed P14,814,742, including 650 tons of rice for immediate assistance to 160,000 displaced families in Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur and North Cotabato.

The Department of Health (DoH) under Secretary Francisco Duque released P11, 464,265.14 for the purchase of assorted drugs and medicines for the thousands of evacuees.

- **New impeachment filed against Arroyo**

Opposition groups in the Philippines filed an impeachment complaint against President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo yesterday, but admitted they did not have the numbers in Congress to make it stick.

Arroyo has fended off three impeachment complaints in each of the past three years with her domination of the House of Representatives. The complaint accuses Arroyo of corruption, extra-judicial killings, torture and illegal arrests. One of the complainants is a woman whose activist son has been missing for 18 months and is widely suspected to have been abducted by security forces.

Arroyo's term in office lasts until 2010 and she is not eligible to seek re-election. Analysts have said political heavyweights are unlikely to join any bid to have her removed by impeachment, preferring to conserve their energies for the 2010 election campaign. Meanwhile, Arroyo yesterday called on Southeast Asian neighbours and partners to meet next week and devise a plan to cushion the region from the impact of the global financial crisis.

- **No threat to Arroyo in impeachment case**

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At least one-third of the 240-member House would have to back a complaint to impeach Arroyo and send it to the opposition-dominated Senate for trial.

But the opposition controls only 28 House seats. "If you look at the numbers, it's really an uphill battle," said left-wing Representative Teodoro Casino, who backed past impeachment attempts. "But it's not just a complaint. It's a political statement, an exercise of our right to stand up against official wrongdoing."

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- **Enhancing bilateral ties between Brunei, Philippines army**

The mutual respect and excellent bilateral ties between Brunei Darussalam and the Republic of the Philippines were further enhanced yesterday morning when the Commander of Royal Brunei Armed Forces, Pehin Datu Lailaraja Major General Dato Paduka Seri Hj Awang Halbi bin Hj Md Yussof received a courtesy call from the Chief of Staff of the Philippines Armed Forces, General Alexander B Yano.

Upon arrival at the Tower Block of the Ministry of Defence, General Alexander B Yano was presented with the General Salute ceremony by the Guard of Honour that was mounted by personnel from the Royal Brunei Land Forces. Following the General Salute ceremony, General Alexander B Yano then proceeded to the reception room for the courtesy call. The introductory visit by the Chief of Staff of the Philippines Armed Forces was aimed at further strengthening the bilateral relations and friendship between both armed forces. General Alexander B Yano with his spouse, Madam Estela A Yano and delegation, will be in the country until Oct 17.

- **13 Muslim Rebels Dead In Philippines Military Offensive –Army**

Thirteen Muslim rebels have been killed in a two- day military offensive on the southern Philippines island of Mindanao, the army said Thursday.

Ground attack aircraft and artillery pounded a Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) hideout on a marshy area near Datu Piang after the military was tipped off that senior MILF leader Ameril Umbrakato was in the area, said Colonel Marlo Salazar, the local army commander.

The assault killed 13 guerillas but Umbrakato was not among them, he told reporters.

There was no government casualties, said Army spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Felix Brawner.

Umbrakato was among two hardline MILF leaders indicted by state prosecutors for the pillaging of a series of Christian villages across Mindanao in early August in raids that left scores of civilians dead and displaced up to half a million people.

The attacks were a riposte to the Supreme Court's decision to block a draft peace agreement with the Philippine government that would have given the MILF control of more than 700 villages in the south.

On Tuesday the Supreme Court threw out the draft agreement, ruling it “unconstitutional." The decision immediately put the Philippine Army on high alert amid warnings of violent repercussions.” Our advancing ground troops confirmed the rebel fatalities, but we do not know whether Umbrakato was among them," Salazar said.

The government has put up a bounty for information leading to the arrest of Umbrakato and fellow MILF leader Abdurahman Macapaar.

- **Philippines Warns Shipping As More Crew Kidnapped Off Somalia**

The vice-president of the Philippines on Thursday confirmed the hijacking of a Filipino-staffed ship off Somalia and appealed to shipping companies to sail within areas patrolled by a multinational coalition.

"We are still awaiting further developments on the latest Somali piracy case," Noli de Castro said in a statement that named the seized vessel as the African Sanderling, which has a crew of 21 Filipinos.

"I want to reiterate our appeal to the international shipping companies to take extra precautionary measures and to strictly follow the directive to limit voyages to the 'safe zone' or the Maritime Security Patrol Area," de Castro said.

"Multinational naval forces of U.S., Britain, and France, among others, are patrolling and giving assistance to vessels" using the shipping corridor, he said.

He said Filipinos sailing off Somalia are receiving "double hazard pay" and” are given the option to disembark from the ship should they decide not to continue with the voyage because of the risks involved."

The Philippines said Wednesday it supports the establishment of a coalition of naval forces off Somalia to prevent the hijacking of foreign vessels, many of which have Filipino crews. The Philippines supplies a major portion of the world's shipping staff, with over 270,000 people working on ships that ply major sea lanes.

Economic Front

- **Philippines will spend more to weather crisis: Arroyo**

MANILA: Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said yesterday that her government will spend more to stimulate the economy and protect growth as the world braces for the worst financial turmoil in 80 years.

A shift in the concentration of the country’s exports to China from the US would help minimise the impact of the crisis that originated from the US mortgage market a year ago,

Arroyo said.Arroyo said the government would pursue plans to sell state assets to raise cash and fund infrastructure spending.

Manila has said it wants to sell its 40% stake, valued about 25.7bn pesos ($542mn), in oil refiner Petron and a portion of its stake in oil and gas explorer PNOC-Exploration Corp this year.

Manila is also less dependent on exports to the US than about 10 years ago, with China and Hong Kong combined now the Philippines' biggest export market.Rising trade within Southeast Asia would also cushion the fall in demand from the West, Arroyo said.

- **Arroyo calls for summit on global risis**

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo yesterday called on Southeast Asian neighbours and partners to meet next week and devise a plan to cushion the region from the impact of the global financial crisis.

Southeast Asian finance ministers said last week economic growth in Asia will suffer from the worst financial crisis in about eight decades but no region-wide measures were necessary to stave off systemic threats because banks in the region were not at risk, unlike in the West.

"I propose for ASEAN plus three to convene on the sidelines of the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) summit in Beijing next week to table the impact of the current credit crunch," Arroyo said in a speech at the launching of a manufacturing facility of food firm RFM Corp.

Aside from the Philippines, ASEAN, or the Association of South East Asian Nations, comprises Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. The plus three refers to the group's dialogue partners China, Japan and South Korea.

Enviromental Front

Vietnam

Political front

- **Vietnam, Egypt look to stronger inspection ties**

Inspectors of Vietnam and Egypt have agreed to increase the exchange of experiences and information to reinforce the fight against crimes and to ensure healthy operations of their societies and state apparatuses.

Inspector General of the Vietnamese Government Inspectorate Tran Van Truyen and Chairman of the Egyptian Administrative Control Authority (ACA) Mohamed El-Tohamy reached consensus on the issue during the Vietnamese chief inspector's visit to Egypt from Oct. 8-15.

The officials shared experiences related to the inspection and supervision work as well as the efforts to combat red tape, corruption and crimes, particularly economic crimes, in Vietnam and Egypt.

While in Egypt, the Vietnamese delegation also met with a number of ACA professional staff members and visited Cairo and other major cities.-

- **Vietnam backs int'l efforts for Afghan peace**

Vietnam will continue contributing to concerted efforts by the UN and the international community to help Afghanistan fulfill its target of long-term peace, stability and development, said a diplomat.

The representative of Vietnam to the UN Security Council, Ambassador Le Luong Minh, made the statement at an UNSC debate on Afghanistan in New York on Oct. 14.

The UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan , Kai Eide reported at the meeting that the security and humanitarian situation in the country has worsened.

Attacks launched by rebels have spread into many regions, leaving heavy casualties for local civilians and aid workers to deal with, Eide said.

According to the UN official, these attacks have hindered the progress of reconstruction efforts, while the Afghan government has failed to deal with the current difficulties, which include food shortages.

Minh called upon all concerned parties in Afghanistan to abide by international law, particularly humanitarian law, and to take practical measures to protect civilians and aid workers.

He said that, alongside security measures, it is necessary to pay more attention to improving the living conditions of the Afghan people, particularly famers, women and children, who are the most vulnerable in the conflict.The ambassador also voiced support for the Afghan government's leading role and responsibility in promoting national stability and development.

Economic Front

Social Front

- **US support Vietnamese with disabilities**

The US government, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided over 2.6 million USD to extend two projects that aim to assist people with disabilities throughout Vietnamese society.

These projects will be implemented by the Vietnam Assistance for Handicapped (VNAH) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), said a statement issued by the US Embassy in Hanoi on October 15.Over the next three years, the VNAH will support government partners to finalise the first set of comprehensive laws on disabilities. This 1.8 million US-funded programme will assist in developing a second national action plan to bring disability issues to the forefront for government resources and planning. The VNAH will help establish 10 provincial organsiations for disabled persons, it said.

The second project implemented by the CRS will expand a model of inclusive education for children at the secondary level and extend a successful programme of international-standard computer training for students with disabilities. From October 2008 to June 2010, the CRS will work with the Ministry of Education and Training and two technical colleges of Vietnam to reach over 1,000 students with disabilities and teachers throughout the country.

The CRS and Vietnamese partners will modify existing secondary school curricula and policies to meet the needs of children with all types and degree including help to students with educational activities and extra-curricula activities, and to graduate 150 students in software engineering courses.

The project will also train 150 visually-impaired and other people with disabilities in basic computer skills.

Laos

Political/Geostretegic front

- **Lao-Thai discuss railway running**

Representatives of Laos and Thailand met this week in Nongkai province, Thailand, on running railway between Vientiane of Laos and Nongkai in Thailand, which is 3.5 km long.

Let both delegations of the meeting were the Deputy Head of the National Railway Organisation, Mr. Sonesack Nor-yansana, and the Deputy Head of the Railway Authority of Thailand, Mr. Thong Mark.

Both sides discussed transport fares, identity cards of Lao and Thai railway officials and the allocation of ticket selling agents. The Thai side said that it could not open running trial as scheduled 23 October because it faced technical problems, while the Lao side confirmed its readiness for the trial.

Economic Front

- **Natural disaster poses threat to the world**

Laos is a country considerably suffered from natural disaster over the past 30 years such as flood, drought, fire, storms and disease epidemic, said Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Welfare Laoly Faiphengyoua.

Since 1975 till now, Laos have experienced more than 10 times of flood and drought. In the year of 1994 to 1996, the floods occurred in three consecutive years with estimated damage to US$91 million, according to data collection of Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The information was released during the celebration of International Nature Disaster last week in Vientiane Capital that drew more than 400 people and high-ranking officials at the rally.

Early the 21st century, Laos was affected by floods for times. The recent flood occurred this year which flooded 73 districts nationwide, of which 1,050 villages, 228,329 victims out of 1,863 families and 12 dead. Leading to 75,000 ha of agriculture products were damaged and left damage cost to 134 billion kip.

Mr Laoly touched upon the Lao Governments care over the natural disaster so the Government created national strategic plan for natural disaster management by focusing on communities protection, national economic security, reduction of nature disaster impact, relief assistance, renovation and preparedness of responding nature disaster, and environmental preservation.

The nature disaster usually occurs every year worldwide including typhoon, earthquake, tsunami, flood, drought and other nature disaster. The typhoon occurred in China, Vietnam, the Phillines, India, Bangladesh and Japan claimed 801 lives, 55 missing people. The earthquake in China, Indonesia and Japan also killed 69,283 people and 19,359 injures and 17,933 missing people.

Social Front

- **Red Cross donate relief aids to flood victims**

President of Lao Red Cross Dr Snivourat Saramany and a representative of International Red Cross on 11 October donated 120 tonnes of rice and consumer?s goods to people in 11 villages, who have been suffered from flood in August.The handover of relief aids was held last week in Thoulakhom district, Vientiane province. Mr Phoutdavanh Chandala, Deputy Chief of Thoulakhom district, received the package from the Head of the Lao Red Cross.

On this occasion Dr Snivourat said that international donors had also provided assistant packages through Lao Red-Cross to 22 villages of two districts?Pakngum and Sangthong, Vientiane Capital, and 33 villages of Thaphabath and Pakxan districts, Borikhamxay province, which was totally worth US$ 180,000.

- **Lao-Thai trade volume increases by 47 percent**

Trade volume between Laos and Thailand reached more than 1.6 billion USD during the first eight months of the year, an increase of almost 47 percent over the previous period. Exports from Laos to Thailand stood at 420 million USD, a year-on-year rise of 55.2 percent.

Key export items from Laos include minerals and agricultural and forestry products, while imports from its neighbour include garments and textiles, drinks, plastics, cement, and steel, which were valued at 1.2 billion USD, an increase of 44.2 percent. The increase in trade between the two countries has been attributed to Laos' economic growth (7.8-8 percent), the stable performance of Laos' currency (kip) against the Thai baht, and the opening of highway R3, which links the two Lao provinces of Luong Namtha and Bo Keo with the Thai capital of Bangkok.

Cambodia

Political front

Cambodia warns of war after border talks

Thailand given ultimatum to remove its troops from the Kingdom's territory or risk sparking a 'full-scale armed conflict', PM says

Thai Foreign Minister Sompong Amornvivat arrives in Cambodia Monday morning for border talks with his Cambodian counterpart Hor Namhong. Negotiations, however, failed to produce any results. THE presence of Thai troops in Cambodia will trigger "full-scale armed conflict", Prime Minister Hun Sen warned Monday after the two sides failed to resolve a dispute over territory on their shared border.

Speaking to reporters after meeting with Thai Foreign Minister Sompong Amornvivat, Hun Sen said that Thailand must withdraw its soldiers within 24 hours.

The fiery language came 10 days after a brief shootout near Preah Vihear temple wounded one Cambodian and two Thai soldiers, escalating a military standoff that has dragged on since July, when Thai troops first entered the Preah Vihear complex. Hor Namhong repeated the premier's tough stance, telling reporters that he "informed Sompong and his general to immediately stop their troops from entering Cambodian territory".

"If they keep moving into Cambodian territory, it will absolutely cause complete armed conflict," he said. "To defend Cambodian sovereignty and territorial integrity, we will take all necessary measures."

- **Fighting erupts on border**

Cambodian and Thai troops open fire on each other with small arms and artillery as tensions in disputed territory near Preah Vihear temple boil over

A Cambodian soldier stands guard over 10 Thai troops captured during heavy clashes Wednesday on the border near Preah Vihear temple. Heavy fighting erupted Wednesday on the border near Preah Vihear temple, killing at least two Cambodian soldiers and wounding two others, Cambodia's Foreign Minister Hor Namhong said. Several Thai troops were also hurt in the clash, a Cambodian military commander said as a standoff over disputed border territory that has simmered since July turned violent.

The fighting lasted for more than two hours before Thai military commanders asked for negotiations, said Chum Chamrong, deputy commander of military police in Preah Vihear province.

Tensions have been building on the frontier since Thai troops reportedly crossed the border into Cambodia in July. Several rounds of crisis talks, the most recent occurring on Monday between Thai Foreign Minister Sompong Amornvivat and his Cambodian counterpart, Hor Namhong, and Prime Minister Hun Sen, have failed to find a solution.

Soldiers from both sides engaged in a brief firefight at Veal Antri on October 3, wounding three troops. Two Thai soldiers were badly wounded when they stepped on land mines two days later while patrolling near the Cambodian front lines.

Following Monday's negotiations, Hun Sen threatened to turn the border into a "battle zone" if Thai troops did not leave Cambodia. Cambodian commanders said Tuesday that Thailand withdrew its soldiers - a claim that was disputed by Bangkok.

- **UN concern over Thai-Cambodian dispute**

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed deep concern about a recent clash on the Thai-Cambodian border, which reportedly claimed two lives. He urged both sides to show restraint and negotiate a peaceful resolution, the Secretary-General spokesman said.

The two countries fired guns and rockets at each other on October 15 along their borderlines near the ancient temple of Preah Vihear.

Tensions between Thailand and Cambodia first flared in July after the Preah Vihear temple was awarded World Heritage status by the UN Cultural body UNESCO. The two countries have failed to reach a settlement, despite several rounds of talks.

Economic Front

- **PM to ask China for new loans**

Prime Minister Hun Sen announced plans to borrow upwards of US$300 million from the Chinese government during his trip to Beijing later this month. "We need some hundreds of millions ... $300 million is a small amount for China," Hun Sen said during the opening of the fourth Asia Economic Forum in Phnom Penh on Tuesday.

Hun Sen is scheduled to attend the Asia Europe Meeting, which runs October 24 and 25 in Beijing. During the trip Hun Sen will also celebrate retired King Norodom Sihanouk's birthday on October 31. Last year, China provided more than $600 million in loans to Cambodia for the development of its infrastructure.

- **Hun Sen warns of economic crisis effect**

WITH the economic crisis spreading through Asian economies, Prime Minister Hun Sen urged international cooperation and government action to prevent a property market crash from dragging down the Cambodian economy.

"The economic crisis started in the real estate sector, and if Cambodia is not careful, we will have the same problem," he said at the fourth Asia Economic Forum, which opened Tuesday in Phnom Penh and ends today.

"The global financial crisis tells us that we must try to find urgent solutions to control the problems in our financial system."

Business leaders and economists fear the international economic turmoil could spread to Cambodia and drive down foreign direct investment and the property market. But in his speech, Hun Sen predicted that China's economy would withstand the economic troubles and could help Asia avoid the worst effects of the crisis.

Hun Sen also urged nations to cooperate to prevent the crisis from spreading. "The financial crisis shows that all nations need each other, even if they are self-sufficient. Isolationist economic and political policies will not work," he said. "To solve the economic problem, we need long-term solutions," he added. Hun Sen added that governments from around Asia and Europe would meet at the end of this month in Beijing to discuss the crisis. He said that human resources, agriculture and trade would be key growth areas over the short- and medium-term.

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Social Front

- **Development blamed for floods**

Residents say the filling in of Phnom Penh's drainage lakes is putting the city underwater

A woman pulls a cart with her children past a flooded area. PHNOM Penh residents and local officials have lashed out at large-scale development companies, saying that the filling in of city overflow ponds and lakes is causing widespread flooding throughout the city.

"I strongly believe that Phnom Penh city will be ruined if construction companies do not stop putting landfill into the [holding ponds] when they develop new buildings," Tin Prasoeur, Phnom Penh's traffic police chief, said Sunday.

People living in high development areas such as Russei Keo district, Phnom Penh Thmey, Toektla, Tuol Sanke, Russei Keo, Kilometre No 6, and Chriang Chamres, say that unusual flooding patterns have been triggered by local development sites, with authorities turning a blind eye to complaints.

In 2005, City Hall prohibited construction companies from filling in overflow ponds and canals for construction, but companies complained."We need people and businesses to join together in protecting our city from floods," Phnom Penh Governor Kep Chuktema

said at the time, calling on national and international businesses, especially big players like CamKo City Co Ltd and Grand Phnom Penh Co Ltd, to support the construction of a new dam in Kobsrov.

Kheng Ser, of CamKo City's project management team, told the Post on Monday that his company will contribute to a dam, but only a small amount.” We will help City Hall's proposal, but not too much," Kheng Ser said.

Business and Politics in The Muslim World

South Asia Report

Ghashia Kayani

October 22, 2008

BANGLADESH:

POLITICAL:

- Consensus to disband fronts AL collects form for registration, urges to lift emergency
- AL and BNP likely to go for movement
- Khaleda charge-sheeted in Barapukuria graft case
- UN supports election under emergency
- Unregistered party not to be allowed to contest poll under own symbol

SOCIAL:

- BTRC to introduce IMEI system by December

ECONOMIC:

- Govt mulls reducing fuel price soon
- Massive crackdown on black money holders, tax dodgers
- Govt creating commerce friendly climate
- Last year's record remittance figure exceeded
- Dhaka inks $3.33 m project documents with UNDP
- Income from RMG export to exceed $25b by 2030
- Lack of gas fails to promote industrialization in south-western region

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- Myanmar delegation visit will strengthen ties
- Long link-road likely to be constructed between BD and Myanmar

Govt mulls reducing fuel price soon

The government is going to reduce the fuel price within a month following the sharp fall in oil price in the international market. "As the oil price is falling drastically in the international market, considering people's sufferings we will also adjust the oil price in our country. An oil tariff formula has been finalised by the concerned ministry. The tariff formula will review prices every month and the adjustment will come into effect after three months," Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser M Tamim told reporters after an exclusive meeting with the Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam at Planning at Commission office at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. The move comes as oil price experienced a sharp fall in the global market. The oil is now being sold below US$87 per barrel down from its record high of $147 on July 11 this year. Earlier, government increased diesel and petroleum prices by 34 to 38 per cent in the local market from July 01 after global prices nearly doubled over the previous twelve months. He said as oil is being sold in the international market below US $ 87 per barrel, the government has decided to cut the price at home within a month. "Following the adjustment the prices of diesel and kerosene will come down. And if the prices of octane and petrol fall in the international market, government will also consider to adjust their prices," M Tamim said.

Myanmar delegation visit will strengthen ties

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury received the visiting Myanmar Foreign Minister U Nyan Win in his office on Wednesday morning, said a Foreign Ministry release. Their discussions reportedly covered a wide range of topics: tri-national road connectivity linking China, Myanmar and Bangladesh; possible purchase of 50,000 to 100,000 tons of rice from Myanmar by Bangladesh on an annual basis, import of pharmaceuticals from Bangladesh to Myanmar, the possibility of setting up a mechanism comprising Bangladesh, Myanmar and UNHCR to expedite the repatriation of the remaining Rohingya refugees, and the scheduling of the next expert-level meeting on maritime boundaries in Dhaka in November. Speaking to the media after the visit, Iftekhar Chowdhury said, "We spoke of ways and means to implement the common projects that were discussed in the bilateral meeting yesterday. Building our friendship is obviously to mutual interest and we will expand both political and economic relations which will be to the advantage of both. Strengthening relations with all our neighbours is a pillar of our ten-point foreign policy and links with Myanmar came within that purview". He added that: "Myanmar also appreciates Bangladesh's policy looking to link ourselves to the east with Myanmar acting as a gateway". Foreign Minister U Nyan Win was at his side during the press briefing.

Consensus to disband fronts AL collects form for registration, urges to lift emergency

After strong debate on some contentious issues, including disbanding party's front organisations and barring partisan election observers, both Awami League and Election Commission reached a consensus during their fourth-time bilateral dialogue at Election Secretariat in the capital. Saying that the AL Working Committee meeting would finally take decision in this regard next Saturday, AL leaders in principle accepted the proposal of EC that the party would set all front organisations free and there would be only independent associate bodies, but it would not be mentioned in the Party Constitution. Apart from the disbanding front organizations, some other issues - including lifting of the State of Emergency, new electoral laws, amendments to the Representation of the People Order (mainly clause 91 (E) which allows to declare a candidate ineligible for contesting polls after completing final selection of nomination) and not to allow some native election observation teams for their alleged partisan role in the past elections.

Massive crackdown on black money holders, tax dodgers

National Board of Revenue (NBR) will launch massive crackdown on black money holders from

November 1, if they (black money holders) do not disclose their undisclosed money by October 31. "It is a matter of social responsibility. The black money holders will have to face legal action if they fail to disclose their undisclosed money before the NBR by the end of this current month. Not only the black money holders but also the persons involved in various business, will have to pay tax in due time. Otherwise they will have to face the same fate like black money holders. Law enforcers will help us in launching crackdown on black money holders," NBR Chairman Abdul Mazid told The Bangladesh Today.

AL and BNP likely to go for movement

Major political parties Awami League and BNP may go for movement to press home their demands including withdrawal of cases against Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia and other politicians to ensure their unhindered participation in the coming parliamentary elections. In recent development-the government's opposition to the bail of Sheikh Hasina in Noor Ali's case and ACC's preparation to submit charge-sheets against Khaleda Zia in Barapukuria coalmine and Zia Orphanage Trust cases has sparked discontent and uncertainty among Awami League and BNP pushing those towards movement. Possibility of movement has been expressed by Awami League Acting President Zillur Rahman who said on September 29 that the party will have to go for movement if party's president Sheikh Hasina is deprived of bails or legal obstacles are not removed. He also added "The party is ready for movement." AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sen Gupta said Hasina's bail rejection is ominous and if she is not allowed to return home freely, the party men will be forced to take to the streets. On the other hand, the ACC's recent preparation to submit charge-sheets against Khaleda Zia and her son in coalmine deal and Zia Orphanage Trust fund embezzlement graft cases has created uncertainty in BNP and its alliance and provoked its supporters. In reaction to ACC's move, BNP leaders have already hinted about possible movement.

BTRC to introduce IMEI system by December

The international mobile equipment identification (IMEI) system will be introduced in the country by December next in the wake of the raising trend of stealing and hijacking cell phone sets. If the system is introduced, he said, mobile phone thieves and snatchers will not be able to use the theft or snatched cell phone sets. "The system has become very effective in different European countries," he added. The BTRC chairman said 20 British companies have shown interest in setting up call centers in the country. Of them, six companies have already signed agreements in this regard. To reduce infrastructure development cost, Maj Gen Alam said the BTRC has formulated guidelines for infrastructure sharing for mobile phone operators. "Our goal is to get modern technology at a cheaper rate," he said.

Khaleda charge-sheeted in Barapukuria graft case

Former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, 10 powerful ministers of her cabinet and five others were yesterday (Sunday) charge-sheeted in the Barapukuria graft case for alleged embezzlement of a huge amount of government money through a misdeal on coalmining. The Anti-Corruption Commission on February 26 filed the case with a police station in the capital on charge of kickbacks amounting to about Tk 159 crore on the Barapukuria Coalmine deal awarded to the highest bidder instead of the lowest. This was the third-first after her release on bail-charge sheet against the immediate-past PM and BNP chairperson. She was earlier charge-sheeted in Gatco and Niko graft cases. According to sources, it was shown in the charge sheet that prime accused Khaleda, Mannan Bhuiyan, MK Anwar and Shamsul are on bail while Dr Mosharraf and Altaf, who are in jail, were shown arrested in this case. The rest of the accused, including Nizami and Mujaheed, were shown absconding. "As such, the IO applied to the court for issuance of arrest warrants against them," one of the sources said. They further said although some other accused are already on bail, they were shown absconding as the relevant papers were not made available. In the charge sheet it was mentioned that there would be 34 witnesses in the case to testify. The charge sheet was submitted under sections 409/109 of the Penal Code and section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1947.

UN supports election under emergency

UN resident coordinator Renata Lok Dessalian on Monday expressed her support to the Caretaker Government's decision of holding upcoming parliamentary elections under state of emergency. After making a courtesy call on Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury at the ministry to discuss the possible visit of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon next month, she said as City Corporation and municipality elections have been held peacefully under the state of emergency, parliamentary elections may be held in the same manner. She expected that the government will relax emergency as per its previous commitment and if the coming parliamentary poll is held on December 18 in an appropriate environment, the UN will likely send election monitoring teams and observers.

Govt creating commerce friendly climate

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed on Monday formally inaugurated automation of Chittagong Customs House at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital. At a ceremony, he said an environment friendly to commerce, industries and agriculture is building up in the country thanks to the initiatives of his interim administration. He described the businesspeople and industrialists as the drivers of the economy, and urged them to make the

best of the business-friendly environment, build industries and create employment. The present government has taken initiative for macro-economic and infrastructural reforms including formulation of proper planning to survive in the competitive world market and achieve economic stability. He said introduction of the most modern system of taxation with the initiative of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry under intensive supervision of the army is a unique example of development activities under government-private partnership. The first phase of the automated taxation system was introduced at the customs house in the port city on Aug 8, with the online submission of export and import accounts. The Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry initiated the installation of the automation system with Tk 2 crore in line with a memorandum of understanding between the customs authorities and the CCCI on April 13. Datasoft, a private local firm, is handling the automation system.

Last year's record remittance figure exceeded

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury on Monday said that last year's record figure of remittances from workers abroad which was US $6.6 billion has already been overtaken by the figures of the first nine months of the current year, which stand at US $6.8 billion, said a Foreign Ministry release issued to the press. "This is extremely good news for us. We expect the figure to climb even further, and if all goes well, hit US $9 billion", he added. The Foreign Adviser also stated that the market for workers overseas has kept expanding. Till the end of September a record number of 6 lakh 90,000 have already been cleared. Last year the figure for this period was 5 lakh 92,000. "This is also a development that matches our expectations", he added. Iftekhar Chowdhury described the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he made a brief stopover on his way back from New York, as the current largest market. "An average of 40,000 workers is going there every month. Good news is that the UAE has asked for 200 highly skilled engineers. The recruitment process will begin soon", he further said.

Unregistered party not to be allowed to contest poll under own symbol

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda said the political parties will have to apply for registration to the election commission within October 15 for contesting ensuing parliamentary polls to be held on December 18 this year. Expressing hope, CEC said all political parties will be able to complete registration with the commission within the timeframe set by the commission if they really want to be registered. Those who are interested to contest the upcoming parliamentary election will have to be registered with election commission. Otherwise, they will not to be allowed to contest national polls," CEC said. CEC further said the parties which will fail to register within the timeframe given by commission, will not be allowed to make alliance with other registered political parties for contesting polls. But, if a non-registered political party wants to make alliance with other registered parties, such non-registered party will have to use election symbol of that party with which it likes to make alliance and its candidates will be considered as candidates of that party, losing own identity,

CEC said referring to the new law.

Dhaka inks $3.33 m project documents with UNDP

Bangladesh and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed three project documents involving US$ 3.33 million or Taka 23.31 crore as grant. The grant will be provided by Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Multilateral Fund under Montreal Protocol to implement three projects in Bangladesh, according to a press release here. The projects are Preparation of second national communication of Bangladesh, Phase out of CFC consumption in the manufacture of Aerosol Metered Dose Inhaler (MDI) in Bangladesh and Institutional strengthening for the phase-out of Ozone depleting substances (phase-V). The projects will help Bangladesh prepare and submit its second national communication (SNC) to the conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The projects will also help Bangladesh phase-out the use of Chloro-Fluoro Carbons (CFC) in the manufacture of Metered Dose Inhalers (MDIs) in three pharmaceutical industries by converting the production technology using CFC to using non-CFC.

Long link-road likely to be constructed between BD and Myanmar

A 23 km long link-road between Bangladesh and Myanmar is going to be constructed immediately by the joint efforts of both countries. After coming out of a bilateral talk between a 55- member delegation led by Myanmar's Vice Senior general Maung Aye and Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed at CA's Office, Foreign Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed said "As a symbol of friendship between Bangladesh and Myanmar a 23 km link-road will be constructed by joint effort of the two countries." He said several important pending issues between two countries including return of 21,000 Rohingya refugees, determination of maritime belt and business related issues were discussed between Myanmar delegation and CA. Foreign Adviser stated the Chief Adviser actually placed a proposal before Myanmar delegates to work out a plan to connect China by extending the proposed link-road. "During talks CA expressed the need for determination of sea boundary between two countries. CA also opined that to implement these plans and solve bilateral problems between two countries political wills and directives are needed," Iftekhar told.

Income from RMG export to exceed $25b by 2030

Income from export of readymade garments (RMG) will exceed $ 25 billion by 2030 although

right now the country is earning $ 10 billion from this sector, said Commerce Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman. At signing of MoU between BGMEA Institute of Fashion and Technology (BIFT) and London College of Fashion under University of the Arts of London, UK held at BIFT premises in Uttara, he said quoting BGMEA President "following this agreement local garment sector will be developed inasmuch as it will likely earn $ 10 billion from this sector by 2030." Terming this MoU landmark decision for development of Country's apparel sector, he said after this agreement overseas students, teachers and experts will be able to come to Bangladesh and local students of fashion and design will go there resulting into development of expertise in our RMG sector. He further stated such sharing of knowledge will create confidence on Bangladeshi products as our local students and technicians will be imparted training on fashion and design of international level. He called for increase in quality and volume of productivity of RMG goods to be able to sustain in the global market and compete in free market policy. He underscored the necessity of more steps by the government to promote RMG sector further to face the challenges of free market policy because being a private organization BGMEA has too little resource to keep required role in this regard.

Lack of gas fails to promote industrialisation in south-western region

The government initiative to promote industrialisation in the country's southwestern region during the last one decade has met with failure in the absence of gas supply. Once hustling industrial belts of Khalishpur and Rupsha have gradually dying out in the face of uneven competition with those enjoying cheaper fuel supplies of natural gas in other areas. government has developed a large export processing zone (EPZ) at Mongla a decade ago with the hope of creating a regional business hub close to the country's second sea port and exploits its potentials. But the effort has gone in vain. Mongla EPZ could not attract investment as it was expected. Barely 12 industrial units have so far set up out of accommodation facility for 124. Entrepreneurs are willing but they ask for gas supply, said an official. The President of Khulna Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Shahruzzaman Mortuza said the region as a whole is lagging far behind in industrialisation mainly because of non-availability of gas. He said Khulna was once in leading position with larger number of manufacturing units. "But most of the small and large industrial units and businesses have either shut down or moved elsewhere," Mortuza told UNB.

SRILANKA:

POLITICAL:

- **Future of the LTTE after the Military Defeat**

- **Sri Lanka President condemns LTTE for the brutal assassination of Major General Janaka Perera and others**
- **SLAF targeted LTTE Peace Secretariat and Political Head Office**

SOCIAL:

- **Sri Lanka Government arranges regular food supply for those civilians trapped in the LTTE controlled areas**

ECONOMIC:

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- **Canadian Government issues agreement for the Sri Lanka Ambassador designate**
- **EU Condemns Anuradhapura bomb blast**
- **US condemned the terrorists attack in Anuradhapura**
- **Canadian Government issues agreement for the Sri Lanka Ambassador designate**

Canadian Government issues agreement for the Sri Lanka Ambassador designate

At last, Canadian Government has issued agreement for the appointment of Daya Perera PC, (82 years) as Sri Lanka High Commissioner to Canada. Sri Lanka President appointed Daya Perera, a well-known criminal lawyer in December 2007, but the Canadian Government delayed the issuance of the Agrement based on simple technical issues. Daya Perera, a former permanent representative for Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York, was appointed to replace the previous High Commissioner, W.S. Karunaratne. It is now believed that despite bereavement in the family, he is expected to travel to Canada shortly to take up the new posting.

Sri Lanka Government arranges regular food supply for those civilians trapped in the LTTE controlled areas

The death toll in Monday (6) morning suicide attack on Major General Janaka Perera (Retd) at Anuradhapura rose to twenty-seven, the Police have appointed several top level teams to commence investigations into the tragedy. The suicide attack injured as many as ninety-four which included seventy men and twenty-four women, but the hospital reports further revealed that some more people have approached Out Patient Department (OPD) directly for treatment since they had received minor injuries.

Future of the LTTE after the Military Defeat

More than three decades, the LTTE has been trying to weaken the democratically elected government in Sri Lanka, primarily using an intelligently crafted terror campaigns and adroit propaganda campaigns, intermittingly switching into political negotiations, however, without any firm commitment, to achieve its messianic goal of carving of a separate state for the Tamils in the north of Sri Lanka. The LTTE, which started its campaign as a small vanguard movement of Tamil insurgency, later developed into a powerful and highly structured terrorist organization with international offices. Over the years it secured adequate support for its activities from the Tamil community and others.

EU Condemns Anuradhapura bomb blast

Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, condemns the suicide blast in Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka) which killed 27 and injured more than 80 people. "I am deeply shocked by the suicide attack at the United National Party office in Anuradhapura this morning. I condemn in the strongest possible terms this appalling act of terrorism which cannot be justified under any circumstances. I send my sincere condolences to the relatives of those killed and injured and sympathy to the Government and people of Sri Lanka for the tragic loss of life," she said.

US condemned the terrorists attack in Anuradhapura

United States has strongly condemned terrorist attacks in Anuradhapura which led to the killing of the Northern Provincial Councilors and others. In a statement released by the US Embassy in Colombo said, that "The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack on October 6 in Anuradhapura that claimed the lives of Major General (retired) Janaka Perera and Dr. Raja Johnpulle and their spouses.

Sri Lanka President condemns LTTE for the brutal assassination of Major General Janaka Perera and others

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse while condemning the covertly and brutal act of terrorism carried out in Anuradhapura today morning in assassinating Major General Janaka Perera, pointed out that the attack was further proof of the need for everyone to unite for the success of the ongoing campaign to eradicate terrorism in the country. He added that in the context of severe setbacks the LTTE is facing in what were reportedly its strongholds in the North; it is now making every attempt to create violent backlashes in other parts of the country, and urged the public to act cautiously in the face of such provocation.

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SLAF targeted LTTE Peace Secretariat and Political Head Office

Sri Lankan Air force yesterday targeted the LTTE Peace Secretariat and the Political Head Office in Kilinochci. Details of damages are not known yet. It was Norwegian Government which funded huge sum of money, amount undisclosed, to build the LTTE's Peace Secretariat as well as the Political Head Office after signing of the peace agreement between the Sri Lanka Government and the LTTE in February 2002. According to reports, Norwegian Government not only funded huge amount of money to build those two buildings, but to date it continues to fund a large sum of money for the running of the Peace Secretariat as well as the political Head office, even after Sri Lanka Government has withdrawn from the peace agreement with LTTE, which was brokered by Norway

MALDIVES:

POLITICAL:

- DhiFM presidential poll stopped after discovering irregularities
- No agenda to make Maldives multi religious
- Majlis to amend employment law
- Election Commission urges for a free and peaceful election
- Gayoom admits holding private bank accounts abroad
- President appeals to all educators to foster Islamic principles
- Gayoom' campaign warns possible defeat
- People's Majlis start live broadcast of meetings
- Thousand of voters protesting for not having their names on the voter's list
- Maldives vote in first multi party presidential election
- President nominates 5th member for Anti Corruption Commission

SOCIAL:

- 50 percent of children use drugs
- maldives destroys 20000 Dutch Lady Milk bottles made in China
- Tourism employees association calls off strike

ECONOMIC:

- Hassan reveals Financial Plan for his manifesto
- State media efforts to blindfold the public will not work

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- 12 foreigners deported

DhiFM presidential poll stopped after discovering irregularities

The controversial presidential election SMS opinion poll conducted by leading private radio broadcaster DhiFM was stopped last night after DhiFM discovered several SMS messages have been received before the starting time and without the knowledge of owners of telephones. DhiFM has blamed national telecommunication service provider Dhiraagu for the manipulation which Dhiraagu has denied. Dhiraagu has said SMS messages sent by their customers have come from Australia. These SMS messages have started coming before 11pm last night which was the starting time of the poll. DhiFM has invited a team of leading journalists to their station every week during the time time of the poll to witness the process for ensuring its transparency. DhiFM Chief Executive Ibrahim Khaleel has said Dhiraagu must take responsibility for the irregularity last night. Khaleel also said Dhiraagu has assured DhiFM during their discussions with Dhiraagu senior officials before the poll was organised there will be no external manipulation. Dhiraagu has said there can be a technical problem and if there were such a problem it will arise from the Dhiraagu system Khaleel added.

Hassan reveals Financial Plan for his manifesto

Independent presidential candidate, former Attorney General Dr. Hassan Saeed has said that in order to fulfill the pledges made in his presidential manifesto, government expenditure and waste will be minimized and additional ways to obtain revenue will be sought. Dr. Hassan made the statement speaking at a ceremony held at Giyaasuhdheen School last night to reveal how he planned to secure funds and how much funds are required to implement his manifesto. Hassan said he was the first presidential contesting the elections to reveal a financial plan on implementing the manifesto. Providing the details of his financial plan, Hassan's running mate Dr. Ahmed Shaheed said Hassan's manifesto will be spread out over a five year period. He said for the first year, Rf.3.68 Billion will be required and that Rf.1.13 Billion will secured by minimizing government wastes and expenditure and that the remaining Rf.1.94 Billion will be secured through tax. According to Shaheed the current tax system will be revised and corporate tax will be introduced. He further said if the free aid were to be taken in to account, a sum of Rf.4.34 Billion can be shown as revenue in the first year's budget of a Hassan's government. Shaheed said after spending for first year requirements of a Hassan's government, a sum of 0.90 Billion will still be remain for the national reserve. Dr. Shaheed at last night meeting detailed on how funding will be secured to execute his manifesto, what will be done to reduce government waste and expenditure and how the national reserve will be increased in a government formed under Hassan's leadership.

No agenda to make Maldives multi religious

Maldivian Democratic Party (DRP) Deputy Campaign Manager Shehenaz (Shehey) has given assurances that the copies of emails, being circulated by party opponents, incriminating the party of having an agenda to make the country a multi religious state are bogus. Dhivehi Rayithunge Party (DRP) yesterday at the daily news briefing has exposed copies of emails exchanged between MDP Deputy Campaign Manager Shehey and key MDP officials which expresses that Maldives can be transformed to multi religious state within one year. MDP last night at a news conference has made public copies of email, which they say are the original copies of the email altered by DRP. The only difference between the copies provided by both parties is the inclusion of one sentence in DRP provided copy. All the rest remains exactly the same including time, date and mail account. Shehey claimed that she could show to media, if original message directly from her inbox, if required. To prove her point she took some reporters, including the Miadhu Daily's correspondent, to the business center of Nalahiya Hotel where the news conference was held and even showed her inbox. The mail which she showed was obviously a previous message which has the same timings and as date given on DRP provided email copy.

Majlis to amend employment law

The People's Majlis will consider a bill to amend the employment law in tomorrow's sitting which will is expected to solve some critical problems faced mainly by those working in tourist resorts and tourism industry. They have appealed the government and other concerned sources to amend the law in a bid to address their grievances. Having failed to receive a favorable response to their request, there have been some protests and petitions by the employees of the tourism sector to demand and fulfill those issues the law has failed to address for a large number of employees working in different sectors and locations. There were similar concerns from employees of other sectors. Employees of the tourism sector have subsequently warned to stage a mass strike after many attempts with the government in a bid amend the law and alleviate their problems. Employees of the tourism sector have decided to hold their strike on 4 October which would have resulted in stopping the services in many resorts. However after learning the government has submitted the necessary amendment to the Majlis at the last meeting which bill will be considered today, they decided to hold the strike on 7 October if the law is not amended accordingly.

Election Commission urges for a free and peaceful election

Election Commissioner Mohamed Ibrahim has called on the people to make presidential election free and peaceful election. He said the Election Commission has made every effort to make the first multi-party presidential election of the country free and fair. All arrangements have been made in capital Male' atolls, resorts and industrial islands for the the vote. Maldivians

living in Colombo, Trivandrum, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore can also vote in the election. There are 208252 eligible voters and for the first time young Maldivians between 18 and 21 will be eligible to vote under the new freedoms enshrined in the new Constitution.

Maldives destroys 20000 Dutch Lady Milk bottles made in China

Maldivian authorities have ordered to destroy more than 20,000 bottles of Dutch Lady Milk manufactured in China in the wake of detection of melamine in Chinese milk products which has set off a global food safety scare. Maldives imports a large quantity of Dutch Lady Milk products but according to official sources Dutch Lady plastic strawberry milk bottles were the only product manufactured in China and tainted with melamine which was imported and used in the Maldives. There are no infant or children formula or milk products imported from China. Director General of Maldives Food and Drug Authority, MFDA Moosa Anver said they have taken quick and stern action in this scare. These measures were taken jointly with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. "We were on full alert and have taken all necessary measures. Fortunately there is no baby formula or other products. Only one variety with Chinese origin is imported. Other varieties of Dutch Lady Products imported to the country are manufactured in other countries. We have checked shops and retailers and found about 20,000 bottles of Chinese origin. We have ordered to destroy them "he said.

Gayoom admits holding private bank accounts abroad

Dhivehi Rahyithunge Party (DRP) presidential candidate President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has admitted to holding private bank accounts in several foreign countries. Presidential candidate Gayoom made the admission speaking in radio show 'Jadhalu' aired by popular radio channel HFM. Speaking on HFM radio show Gayoom said even though he has several private bank accounts in various foreign countries, he actually has very little money. Country's main opposition party Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has been openly saying that Gayoom poses private bank accounts in some European countries. When HFM presenter asked whether MDP claims were true and if so how much money doe he have, Gayoom replied that although he has private accounts in some foreign countries he had very little money and it put a figure on it would be difficult. "I have very little money, I just can't say how much it is, just like that , but I do have accounts in some foreign countries, it is private accounts opened by me, but there is very little money in it, but that money , is not in them, it is a big lie" Gayoom said.

50 percent of children use drugs

Fifty percent of our children are users of some form of illegal drugs, President of Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) Umar Naseer has said. He made the statement speaking to the people of Laamu Fonadhoo while on a campaign tour of the atoll. Umar said drug traffickers have constructed high rise buildings using money obtained from selling drugs. He said while the traffickers are benefiting it is the future of the country and the future of our children and children's children that is at risk. "Approximately 750 million rufiyaa is spent on buying drugs annually, and about 50 percent of children are using some form of illegal drugs, the country's jail is full of drug offenders, courts are finding it difficult to cope, so it is imperative that we destroy this system of drug smuggling and trading" Umar said. From Fonadhoo, IDP Presidential candidate Umar travelled on to the island of Maavah. In Maavah, Umar met the people discussed the issues and difficulties faced with the people and explained his policies. Sharing his policies with Maavah islanders Umar said pressing problems faced with the Maldivian people such as housing issues, the menace of drugs, health and social issues can only be addressed by him.

State media efforts to blindfold the public will not work

Despite attempts by state controlled media to blindfold the public, the love, respect and the overwhelming support the people have for Jumhoory Party's presidential candidate Qasim Ibrahim will not get reduced, JP's running mate Ahmed Ali Sawaadh has said. After participating in the vehicle round which commenced in Hithadhoo, Sawaadh shared his thoughts and aspirations with people of the atoll. "Today we have seen how prepared we are to elect Qasim for the changes expected by the people, this shows that Qasim is not only supported and loved by other parts of the country but also here is this atoll as well" Sawaadh , a native of the atoll said. Speaking on the same tone, Qasim said state media is trying to mislead the Maldivian people on the support and love afforded to Qasim Ibrahim by the Maldivian people. He said this is going on very openly and that even the people are aware of it.

President appeals to all educators to foster Islamic principles

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has appealed to all educators to foster in their students, Islamic principles and good moral values and to prepare them to become productive and responsible citizens. He made the statement in his message on the occasion of World Teachers' Day 2008, which is being marked. Highlighting on this year's Teachers' Day theme "Teachers Matter", President Gayoom called on teachers to focus on continuous upgrading of their knowledge. In this regard, President noted that work was been done to provide more professional development opportunities for teachers.

Tourism employees association calls off strike

The Tourism Employees Association of Maldives, TEAM has called off their peaceful strike which they have planned for today to further demand the rights of employees working in tourist resorts and industry. TEAM was planning to hold this strike on 4 October but postponed it after the government has tabled a bill to amend the employment law with the demands made by TEAM. They have said earlier they will not hold the strike if the necessary amendments are incorporated in the employment law. The People's Majlis in its meeting yesterday has debated the bill on the employment law with several amendments. The Majlis has passed the bill with most of the amendments including the crucial aspects demanded by TEAM. TEAM has organized the peaceful strike where almost all employees working in the industry were to participate which might have paralyzed the hugely popular and important industry. But TEAM was cautious about such a strike and thus worked very hard with the government and other stakeholders to find an amicable solution.

Gayoom' campaign warns possible defeat

In a startling new development of the highly competitive presidential race, officials of independent presidential candidate Dr. Hassan Saeed has strongly suggested President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom who is contesting for a seventh term may be defeated as he will not be able to secure an absolute majority in the first round. The news came as a serious blow to President Gayoom who is the presidential candidate contesting from the government party DRP. Dr. Mohamed Jameel from Dr. Hassan Saeed's camp divulged this information referring to an email a copy of which given to media, they said they have received from a very reliable source. The mail addressed to President's eldest son Faris Maumoon from a Bob and Mark dated 5 October said the polling suggests that Gayoom will win the most votes in the election on Wednesday, but he will fall short of an absolute majority.

People's Majlis start live broadcast of meetings

In a historic move towards greater freedom of expression and dissemination of information, the People's Majlis has started live broadcast of its meetings yesterday. The decision followed Majlis signing an agreement with two private broadcasters DhiFM and AtollTV on Sunday. The issue of broadcasting meetings of both Special Majlis and People's Majlis was one of the hottest subjects demanded during the debates of the constitutional reform by many opposition members, most notably Laamu member Moosa Maniku. Speaker of the Special Majlis Gasim Ibrahim was instrumental in moving forward the matter responding favourably to these demands. Gasim took the decision to start broadcasting Special Majlis meetings and warned he would assign the work to private broadcasters if the government objects to it. Information Ministry responded to

the request with some reluctance, conditions and censorship and Majlis meetings were broadcast as the last programme of the day in midnight and early mornings. TV Maldives started broadcasting Majlis meetings in June last year. Many opposition members of the Majlis expressed serious concern about censoring and broadcasting the meetings late in the night interfering sleep and rest of many people.

Thousand of voters protesting for not having their names on the voter's list

Thousands of voters have protested near the main Election Administrative Office in Male' for not having their names on the voter's list. Protesters have shouted angry remarks after they have been told their names are not registered and cannot vote in the crucial election. Elections officials admitted there are problems but preferred to settle the matter after consulting with candidates. One of the Commissioners has earlier told media there are many errors and misunderstandings in the list of voters and hence the election is not likely to be a free and fair election. The dispute was quickly resolved after a meeting of Election Commissioners and candidates. There was suggestion to delay the election for about a month to give sufficient time for better organization. But except for one candidate all others felt election must proceed. However, there were concerns by some candidates and parties from the beginning about rushing into the election after ratifying the Constitution only on 7 August 2008.

Maldives vote in first multi party presidential election

Maldives is voting in the first multi-party presidential election today to elect a new president. Six candidates are contesting in the election.They are incumbent President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party, DRP, Mohamed Nasheed, Anni of the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party, MDP, independent candidate former Attorney General Hassan Saeed, former Finance Minister billionaire Gasim Ibrahim of Jumhoory Party, JP, Male' member of the People's Majlis Ibrahim Ismail of the Social Liberal Party, SLP, Umar Naseer of the Islamic Democratic Party, IDP. The election is creating history in the island republic which has embraced far reaching democratic reform and adopted a new Constitution on 7 August 2008 after a process of lengthy and heated debate in the People's Special Majlis assembled on 19 July 2004. The reform agenda of the country is culmination of an unprecedented struggle to introduce a liberal democracy in the country.

12 foreigners deported

12 foreign national have been deported after they have assaulted and harassed a group of Maldivian workers in Dholhiyadhoo Island in Shaviani Atoll. The 12 foreigners are Bangladeshis and they have attacked these Maldivians while they were working on contract in the island. Dholhiyadhoo Island is being developed as a new tourist resort of star class. The incident took place on 12 August when the group of Maldivians was attacked causing bodily harm to them. Police have done a full investigation into the incident and the 12 foreigner have confessed of their guilt. According to reliable information, the Controller of Immigration has decided to deport these people and they will not be allowed to visit Maldives for a period of 10 years. These people have been deported on 15 September.

President nominates 5th member for Anti Corruption Commission

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has submitted the name of Ali Rasheed Umar of M. Aadhilleege for appointment as the fifth member of the interim Anti Corruption Commission to be established under the new Constitution. People's Majlis in its meeting on Monday has approved names of member of the former Anti Corruption Board Abdul Raheem Abdul Rahman, former member of the Anti Corruption Board Abdullah Adam, G Dh Thinadhoo Halaveli Abdullah Hilmy and S. Hithadhoo Ranfas Hassan Luthfy for appointment as members to the Anti Corruption Commission. The fifth name Saud Ibrahim of R Innamaadhoo was not accepted by the Majlis. During the brief debate before the vote on these names on Monday, some members severely criticised President Gayoom for not sending more names for the Commission so that the Majlis could decide more suitable members from the list of applicants. They said President Gayoom lacks sincerity to the purpose and objectives of the Constitution and law. Members of the Majlis also criticised the committee for not doing their a responsible job in recommending the names for the Anti Corruption Commission.

NEPAL:

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- NC to launch national campaign
- NC deplores govt apathy towards conflict victims
- Raja, rajauta system abolished, DPM informs Mustangi Raja
- Maoists to hold national conference on Nov 10

- Koirala says he wants to end 'indiscipline' in NC
- Armed groups to get invitation after Dashain
- Inmates who have completed one-third of sentence could be released
- FM headed for US
- Koirala vows to bring NC back to its pre-election form
- Maoist hardliners pressure for People's Republic
- Army integration will be completed without hassles, claims DPM Gautam

SOCIAL:

- Govt preparing to strictly control alcohol consumption

ECONOMIC:

- Acharya calls world community for financial support to LDCs
- Oli calls Maoists' 'talks' of establishing people's republic a farce

NC deplores govt apathy towards conflict victims

The main opposition party Nepali Congress (NC) has deplored what it calls the government's apathy towards victims of conflict. Referring to the police highhandedness in evicting protesting conflict victims who were staging sit-in in front of ministerial quarters, the party has accused the Maoist-led government of ignoring their plight. In a statement issued by the party, the NC has said that the new government has chosen to disregard the problems faced by conflict victims. Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked the government to refrain from using force to quell peaceful protestors. It deplored the use of force by police in dispersing the sit-in staged by conflict victims. The NHRC has also urged the protestors to make their protests totally peaceful and refrain from infringing on the rights of other people including the right for free movement.

NC to launch national campaign

The main opposition party Nepali Congress (NC) has decided to launch a nationwide campaign to reinvigorate the party. The party will hold a mass meeting in Biratnagar on October 25 to kick off the campaign. The mass meeting is being coordinated by Morang district Congress committee, according to its chief Amrit Aryal. Aryal informed that party president and former Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala will address the mass meeting – the first being organised by NC after it became the main opposition party.

Raja, rajauta system abolished, DPM informs Mustangi Raja

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam met with Mustangi Raja Jigme Palbar Bista and informed him about the government's decision to root out the

system of Raja, rajauta. As per the system, there were four petty kings recognised by the government as cultural custodian of certain areas. There were such nominal kings in Mustang, Salyan, Jajarkot and Bajhang. During the meeting, Bista accepted the government's decision and promised to work for the welfare of the local culture as a commoner. He also requested the government for support in his health treatment

Acharya calls world community for financial support to LDCs

Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations Madhu Raman Acharya has called upon the international community to undertake a comprehensive approach to financing development in the developing countries. Addressing the General Debate of the Second Committee, sixty-third Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Acharya stressed the need of a broad and meaningful preparatory process for the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in 2011 with a view to achieving a new strategic and result-oriented action plan for the next decade. Recalling the mid-term review of the Almaty Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Counties (LLDCs) last week, he underlined the need for sustained trade-enhancing support measures and higher investment in transit transport infrastructure of the LLDCs, a statement by permission mission of Nepal to UN said. Acharya said, the post-Kyoto regime should address the serious impacts of climate change on the least developed countries, small island nations, and the mountainous communities. Informing the Committee about Nepal's fundamental political transformation and the economic challenges which involves the tasks of developing rural infrastructure and that of the post-conflict reconstruction, he asked all the development partners to support national initiatives through the effective mobilisation of financial and technical resources.

Govt preparing to strictly control alcohol consumption

The government is preparing to bring in stringent rules to control the consumption of alcohol. Saying that drinking alcohol is one of the reasons for rising crime and social problems, the government is going to ban the sales and consumption of alcohol except in prescribed areas and in prescribed times. First, the government has asked the retailers to finish off their current stock of alcohol within few weeks after which only the licensed retailers will be allowed to trade in the alcohol. “Then, we will subsequently announce strict measures whereby the alcohol will have to be sold from a place where everyone can see, within certain time and to certain age-group of people,” said Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam. “Those who want to buy alcohol will have to give their name, their father’s name and their grandfather’s name to the seller. He will have to produce citizenship certificate and, then only, he can take the alcohol to his home for consumption,” Gautam said. The minister said that the government will also take steps to regularize the traditional consumption of alcohol in certain communities. “There are communities like Newar and Magar where alcohol consumption is linked with tradition and religion. That will be regularized,” he said.

Maoists to hold national conference on Nov 10

The central committee of the Maoists ended, Tuesday, after deciding to hold national conference on November 10. "The central committee meeting ended and we have now decided to settle all the issues through the National Conference, which will be held on November 10," Barsha Man Pun Ananta told Nepal FM. Ananta said that the national conference will forge party's future action plans and strategies. At the CC meeting, Prime Minister and party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda is said to have proposed to go for National Conference to settle debates on what sort of "People's Republic" the party wants to establish, among others.

Koirala says he wants to end 'indiscipline' in NC

Former prime minister and Nepali Congress (NC) president Girija Prasad Koirala has said that he will get rid off 'indiscipline' in the party. Stating that NC has a history of discipline and dutifulness, Koirala said a campaign will be launched to strengthen the party organisation in the coming days. Meanwhile, the NC Morang district committee is organising a mass meeting in Biratnagar on October 25. The mass meeting will be addressed by party president Koirala. This will be the first mass meeting of NC since it became main opposition party.

Armed groups to get invitation after Dashain

Minister for Commerce and Supplies Rajendra Mahato has said the government will send formal letter to armed groups in the Terai inviting them for peace talks soon after Dashain festival. Speaking at the Reporters Club, Mahato said the government would not resort to the policy of suppression but rather make every effort to meet the demands of the rebellion groups through peaceful dialogue. Stating that indirect communication has been established with the armed outfits, Mahato assured of security to leaders who sit for negotiations. Minister for Science and Technology Ganesh Shah also reiterated the government's position to find solution of all problems through peaceful talks. Meanwhile, leaders have criticised the Maoists for taking up the issue of People's Republic on the eve of drafting a new constitution. Pradip Gyawali of UML rejected the idea of establishing People's Republic immediately and stressed on the need to concentrate on writing a democratic constitution for Nepal. Refuting allegations that Maoists are head.

Inmates who have completed one-third of sentence could be released

The government is preparing to release prison inmates who have completed one-third of their prison sentence. "All prisoners who have completed one-third of their sentence except those facing grave charges of nine kinds including rape, human trafficking, wildlife trafficking and so on will be released," Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam said. "There will be some court procedures and legal procedures that will have to be first completed though," he added. "We are also planning to release inmates who face political charges," he said. Earlier the cabinet had decided to release inmates who have completed fifty percent of their sentence. Gautam said that the cabinet has now made fresh decision to release those completing 33 percent of sentence.

FM headed for US

Finance Minister Dr. Baburam Bhattarai is leaving, Tuesday, for Washington DC, the United States to attend the annual meeting of the board of governors of the World Bank. Dr. Bhattarai will brief the World Bank officials regarding the new government's plan for economic revolution in Nepal. He is leading a three-member Nepali delegation, which includes Finance Secretary Rameshwore Khanal and chief of Foreign Aid Coordination Division of the Finance Ministry Krishna Gyawali.

Koirala vows to bring NC back to its pre-election form

Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala has claimed that he will bring the party back to its pre-election form within just three months. Speaking to party workers in his hometown Biratnagar on Monday, Koirala said he was confident that the party would regain its lost strength within that timeline. In the meantime, the octogenarian leader threw a clear hit that he was not yet ready to transfer leadership to what is known within the Congress party as second generation, saying he would not retire unless the party regained its old form. The NC president also asked the cadres to resolve internal differences and focus on rebuilding the party organization.

Oli calls Maoists' 'talks' of establishing people's republic a farce

A senior leader of ruling coalition partner Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) has termed the 'talks' of establishing people's republic by some Maoist leaders as a 'farce.'"They are only trying to fool the people by talking about people's republic," Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, UML standing committee member, said, speaking at a programme in Jhapa. He also blasted the decision of the Maoist-led government to raise the monthly salaries of People's Liberation Army (PLA) by Rs 2000. "They are the combatants who are being looked after by the government in the camps. It is wrong to raise their salaries because the salaries of government employees have been increased.

Maoist hardliners pressure for People's Republic

Hardliners of the CPN (Maoists) have put pressure on the party leadership not to deviate from party's aim to establish 'people's republic' in Nepal. Speaking during the central committee meeting at Baluwatar Monday, the leaders stressed the need to carve strategies to establish People's Republic at any cost. According to Hari Bhakta Kadel, a central committee member, the CC members suggested a rethink over the current 'liberal line' taken by the party and go for policies that could help establish a communist rule at the earliest. Other leaders, including party spokesperson Krishna Bahadur Mahara, refused to speak to journalists. The central committee members have completed their turn to speak on the political report presented by party chairman and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Army integration will be completed without hassles, claims DPM Gautam

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam have said that the army integration will be completed without hassles. "We will soon form a special committee as per the constitutional provision. It will decide whether to integrate all of the PLA or those who fulfill certain parameters into the Nepali Army," he said, adding, "This process will be carried out in such a manner that everyone will be content." Addressing an interaction programme, at the Reporters' Club, Gautam dismissed possibilities of collapse of the current government. "There is no alternative to this coalition. Any possibility of government's collapse arises only when there is an alternative," he said. Gautam claimed that with his new measures, the security situation in the country will be maintained up to full satisfaction within next six months. He vowed to control the nightclubs and dance bars. "They are the center of crime and immorality. The government will not compromise in this issue," he said.

MYANMAR:

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- Myanmar junta raises suppression, says opposition
- Myanmar army moves against refugees, aid organization says

SOCIAL:

- Burma Ruby Ban Provides Opportunity for Collectors Universe Colored Gemstone Subsidiary
- UN expert outlines steps for improving human rights
- U.N. chief seeks less talk, more action

ECONOMIC:

- PTTEP sees Myanmar M-9 gas project ready end of 2011
- Rigorous checking on border trade route
- Chinese milk scandal provokes confusion among businesses
- Myanmar agrees to export gas if new reserve found

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- New role for an old Indian road
- Myanmar agrees to move forward hydropower plant proposal
- Burmese soldier murdered on Burma-India border
- Myanmar offers help to B'desh for hydro power project
- Top Burmese junta leader arrives in Bangladesh for talks
- Bangladesh proposes talks for link with China, Myanmar

Myanmar junta raises suppression, says opposition

Myanmar's military rulers have stepped up suppression of political opponents ahead of the country's elections in 2010, an opposition party spokesman said. Nyan Win, of the National League for Democracy, said many party members arrested since last year were now facing trials, with at least 30 having been sentenced to at least 2 1/2 years in prison between September and early this month. The regime has increased pressure on opponents and critics "so that they can manipulate the elections any way they like," he said. The junta has announced elections in 2010 as part of a "roadmap to democracy" that critics have slammed as a sham designed to cement the military's power. A military-backed constitution was approved in a national referendum in May, but the party charges that the vote was unfair.

New role for an old Indian road

The Stilwell Road, built during World War II as a strategic link between India and Myanmar (then Burma), is being resurrected as part of India's "Look East" policy of improving economic links with its Southeast Asian neighbors. The 1,726 kilometer road, named after General Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, was built in the latter months of the war to supply weapons to Chiang Kai Shek, China's leader during the Second Sino-Japanese War, as his Kuomintang forces battled the retreating Japanese in China's Yunnan province. It was constructed as alternative to a hazardous air supply route to Kunming dubbed the "aluminum trail" due to the litter of crashed aircraft that marked its way through the mountains. The road was opened on May 20, 1945 after 28,000

US and British engineers completed what they called “the toughest job”. Their efforts inspired the 1945 film Stilwell Road which starred Ronald Reagan as its lead narrator.

Myanmar agrees to move forward hydropower plant proposal

Visiting Myanmar high official agreed to move forward a Bangladesh proposal to set up a hydro power plant project in Myanmar from which Bangladesh will get electricity. This came during the meeting here between Myanmar Energy Minister Brig General Lun Thi and his counterpart, the Bangladesh caretaker government Chief Adviser's Special Assistant for Power and Energy Ministry M Tamim. As per the proposal, Bangladesh will build up the plant in Myanmar at its own cost and get 70 percent of the electricity from the project while Myanmar will get 30 percent as royalty. Tamim after the meeting told reporters that the neighboring country's minister assured him of taking necessary steps to move forward the scheme. The hydropower-project proposal was initiated by Bangladesh about two years ago. Both sides also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to implement the project.

Burma Ruby Ban Provides Opportunity for Collectors Universe Colored Gemstone Subsidiary

A leading provider of value-added authentication and grading services to dealers and collectors of high-value collectibles, diamonds and colored gemstones, commented today on the opportunity for increased gemstone documentation created by the recently enacted legislation banning the importation of Burma rubies and the promulgation of implementation by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act of 2008 provides for a ban on importation of rubies originally mined in Burma, now known as Myanmar, with enforcement by CBP focusing on documentation to support the origin of the ruby as not from Burma. According to CBP, Phase 1 of the implementation requires supporting documentation that the ruby did not originate from Burma and to maintain that information for five years. Phase 2 of the implementation will be developed over the next several months to improve the verification process. American Gemological Laboratories, a subsidiary of Collectors Universe, is one of three major gemstone laboratories in the United States that has the spectrographic technology and trained personnel to analyze gemstones, including rubies, to provide high confidence analysis of the country of origin. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, in the last reporting period of 2006, the United States imported 3.68 million carats of rubies.

PTTEP sees Myanmar M-9 gas project ready end of 2011

PTT Exploration and Production, a unit of Thailand's top energy firm, said on Wednesday it expected its M-9 natural gas project in Myanmar to be completed by the end of 2011."It will be done by the end of 2011," Asdakorn Limpiti, vice president in PTTEP's strategy and capability development division, told Reuters at the Africa Upstream 2008 oil conference in Cape Town.

Rigorous checking on border trade route

Travellers are being rigorously checked at military checkpoints, especially between Lajayang and Garayang Villages on the illegal Sino-Burma border trade route in Kachin State, northern Burma by the Burmese Army, since Monday (October 6), said travellers. Cars and people are not being allowed after 6 p.m. between Myitkyina and Laiza for security reasons, said sources close to the Burmese Army. People from both the State Peace and Development Council (SDPC) and the KIO between Myitkyina and Laiza are affected by this order. The orders have come from the junta's Northern Command HQ based in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. Several travellers told KNG today, that every car carrying passengers and motorcyclists are being stopped at more than five multi-security checkpoints between the two villages. People have to get down from their cars and motorcycles and cross the checkpoints on foot.

Burmese soldier murdered on Burma-India border

Burmese soldiers have been deployed to an area along the border with India where a lance corporal from Light Infantry Battalion 228 was killed and his gun taken on 23 September. The lance corporal was killed on a jungle path regularly used by black market traders near Lailet village in Falam Township, Chin state. Since his death, soldiers from LIB 228 and others stationed in Kalay, Sagaing division, have been deployed to the area. A police officer on duty at an Indian police station in Kyanphaing told DVB that police were still investigating the incident, but said that India was not involved in the murder. "There has been no involvement in this matter on the part of India. The Myanma soldiers crossed the border and demanded money from merchants," the officer said.

Chinese milk scandal provokes confusion among businesses

A government warning to people of possible contamination from Chinese milk and milk products has negatively impacted Burmese markets and sown confusion among

consumers, say local businessmen. A domestic dairy company, Diary Queen, in Mandalay, said that in addition to having to prove that its products are free of the chemical melamine, it also has to do extra work in advertising through newspapers. “We take our raw materials from Poland and other parts of Europe. And all of them are tested and free of chemicals, but we have to re-advertise to convince our customers,” an official at the company explained. The official said they produce baby cereals, condensed milk and other milk related products, all of which are approved by the Food and Drug Authority (FDA) of Burma, yet the company has been forced to do extra work to convince customers in the wake of the Chinese milk scandal.

UN expert outlines steps for improving human rights

Improving the situation of human rights in Myanmar is still a challenging task, according to the independent United Nations expert on the issue, who has outlined a series of measures for the South-East Asian as it proceeds with its “road map to democracy” announced earlier this year.

Respect for international human rights standards is indispensable in paving the road to democracy,” Tomás Ojea Quintana, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, writes in a **report**. “Myanmar is going through a unique moment in its political history,” he says, noting that the country’s new Constitution was finalized in February and adopted through a referendum in May. “The next step in the road map for national reconciliation and democratic transition is the election in 2010.” Mr. Quintana proposes four core human rights elements to be completed by the Government before the 2010 elections. The first is to review and amend those domestic laws which limit fundamental rights – such as freedom of expression, opinion, peaceful assembly and association – and contravene the new Constitution and international human rights standards. He stresses that if those general elections are prepared and conducted in an atmosphere in which human rights are fully respected, “the process will be credible, resulting in progressive achievement of democratic values.

Myanmar agrees to export gas if new reserve found

Myanmar will export natural gas to Bangladesh if it finds new gas reserves while it has shown interest in setting up a hydropower project in that country from where electricity could be supplied to Bangladesh. The decision came out of a meeting between Myanmar's Energy Minister Brig General Lun Thi and Prof M Tamim, chief adviser's special assistant for power and energy ministry. The same day the two countries agreed to start soon construction of the proposed 25-kilometre link road expected to ensure better connectivity between them and eventually connect the former to China. The understanding was reached when visiting Myanmarese Construction Minister Saw Tun called on Communications and Housing and Public Works Adviser Major General (retd) Ghulam Quader at his office. Talking to The Daily Star in the evening, Prof Tamim said, "In principle, Myanmar has no restriction on exporting gas to us. They

are open to discuss with us the gas export issue. That country will explore two new potential fields in December." The neighbour on the east expressed positive interest in both ideas, as Bangladesh has a huge demand for power as well as for fertilisers including urea which requires gas for its production.

Myanmar offers help to B'desh for hydro power project

As per the proposal, Bangladesh will build up the plant at its own cost and get 70 per cent of the electricity from the project, while Myanmar will get 30 per cent as royalty, Bangladesh Power and Energy Minister M Tamim said here. Dr Tamim said he discussed with the visiting Myanmar Energy Minister Brig Gen Lun Thi, two particular issues-- gas import and setting up hydro power project. He said it has offered Myanmar to import gas on two modes, either purchase on cash basis or set up a fertilizer plant under a joint venture. Bangladesh will provide land and expertise while Myanmar will provide its gas and then both the countries can share the output. But the visiting Minister informed that his country has no available gas right at this moment to export to Bangladesh as it has already signed deals with China and Thailand to export its gas from the existing fields. Mr Tamim said, the Myanmar Minister also told him that if any new gas is discovered from the ongoing exploration, then it would consider the gas export to Bangladesh.

U.N. chief seeks less talk, more action

Submitting his second annual report on the organization which he heads, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon says the United Nations must resist tendencies to simply call for action and instead focus on enhancing its own operational capacity. Ban's annual report draws attention to an increasing workload for the international body, citing a litany of successes over the past year while appealing for member states to charge the body with an increased ability to deliver concrete results. "To meet growing needs and high expectations, we must enhance our operational delivery," assessed the Secretary General. "This means concentrating our resources where the Organization can make the biggest difference. We cannot just make promises or call on others to act; we cannot wait for solutions to emerge." His words seemed to echo the growing number of pleas from Burma activists and interest groups urging the United Nations to act, and not simply issue repeated calls for what it would like to see happen in the Southeast Asian country. Yet, the 71-page summary of the past year failed to make any direct reference to the situation in Burma and the Secretary General's attempts at facilitating a process of national reconciliation, reform and respect for rights in the country.

Myanmar army moves against refugees, aid organization says

Myanmar's army and their allies the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) have launched an offensive against Karen refugees in the border region with Thailand, an aid organization said Tuesday. Speaking from the border town Mae Sot in northern Thailand, Help without Frontiers, an Italian-based organization aimed at helping refugees of the long-running Karen insurgency, said several villages have been overrun already. "The villagers are chased, rice barns and food are sequestered or destroyed, large cornfields are burned as well as several houses in different villages," the NGO said in a statement. Five schools and two hospitals the organization was operating in the region with donations from Europe had to be closed. The helpers were still trying to treat the often heavily injured victims despite the fighting.

Top Burmese junta leader arrives in Bangladesh for talks

Burma's second ranking official has arrived in Bangladesh for talks that will focus on border issues and a possible land leasing deal for Bangladeshi farmers. Vice Senior General Maung Aye brought an entourage of 55 officials with him, including seven ministers, for the three-day visit. During meetings with Bangladeshi officials the delegation will discuss sea border issues, cross-border road projects and a plan to lease border land to farmers in Bangladesh for cultivation. The establishment of a cross-border road is expected to top the agenda. The road is part of a plan to create an overland link between Bangladesh and China.

Bangladesh proposes talks for link with China, Myanmar

Bangladesh on Tuesday proposed a tripartite meeting to discuss the possibility of linking the South Asian country with China via a cross-border road with Myanmar, an official said. Bangladesh's chief foreign policy adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed presented the proposal at a meeting with General Maung Aye, a high-ranking member of Myanmar's military junta, who is on a three-day official visit to Bangladesh. Maung Aye, vice chairman of State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar, leads a 55-member delegation including seven government ministers. Dhaka has made the cross-border road, an approximately 120-kilometre overland link to China, a key point on the visit's agenda. Myanmar officials did not respond immediately on the proposal saying they would think need to think it over. Other topics under discussions were

disputes over a maritime boundary, and leasing of Myanmar land to Bangladeshi farmers for cultivation.

Bhutan:

POLITICAL:

- Another appointment in ACC court
- Bhutan Post CEO post in limbo
- Strategic management for organisational success

SOCIAL:

- Apple season ends on a sweet note
- Lifestyle diseases double risk of kidney failure

ECONOMIC:

- Carving up the pay hike pie

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- Coming to terms with America

Apple season ends on a sweet note

A slow and unsure start to this year's apple business ended on a positive note with those in the trade smiling sweetly. Apple quality and quantity was good and, as the season nears its end, prices went as high as US$ 670 a metric tonne (MT), the highest in recent years. Records with the Bhutan Agricultural Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA) in Phuentsholing showed that the total export has increased significantly compared to last year. This year, between August 25 and October 2, a total of 1,157.8 MT of apples worth Nu 21.204 million was exported to Bangladesh and 2,332.07 MT worth Nu 21.993 million to India. Last year, only 665.266 MT was exported to Bangladesh and 2,255.057 MT to India. At the start of the season, floor price was fixed at US$ 500 per MT, the same as last season. Widening work on the Thimphu-Phuentsholing highway, which caused several roadblocks, discouraged many buyers from Bangladesh this season. But Indian importers from the neighbouring states of Assam and Bengal more than filled the gap. Exporter Namgyal Wangchuk of Pinnga export said that he could export only 20 trucks of apples to Bangladesh this year. Pinnga exported more than 40 trucks to India. Apples to India were sold at Nu 500 per carton (about 25 kg). Indian importers also bought Bangladesh-bound rejected apples. Export rejected apples were sold to Indian buyers at Nu 250 to 300 per box. An Indian

buyer from Bihar, Rangit Singh, who has been in the apple business for eight years, said that even export reject apples this year were of good quality. “The quality has really improved this season along with bumper production in Paro,” he said.

Another appointment in ACC court

Twice eliminated candidate for the post of managing director of the Woodcraft Centre in Thimphu, Ngeema Sangay Tshempo, has appealed to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), calling the selection process “tainted, unfair and corrupt.” In the first selection interview, the present director of department of industries, Sangay Wangdi was selected. He was supposed to join office in September but had to withdraw his appointment after the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) objected on grounds that he had not resigned from his current position and did not have its formal approval. Ngeema S Tshempo was second in line. Ngeema S Tshempo, the former People’ Democratic Party candidate from Dagana, said that, since he was second in line, he should have been given preference because it was logical, time and cost effective for the organisation. “It was the board of Woodcraft Centre’s responsibility to check if candidates had fulfilled all criteria and completed formalities but the board did not do so,” he said. This is the second time that a candidate has appealed to ACC regarding the selection of Bhutanese corporation executives. The first appeal to ACC was on the appointment of Bhutan Post’s new chief executive officer (CEO) in September. The Woodcraft Centre readvertised the vacancy on September 3 to encourage more participants to compete for the position. The second interview was held on September 29 and Ngeema S Tshempo contested again. A former MoEA official, Pema Rinzin, was selected. However, the chairperson of the board of Woodcraft Centre, Dasho Dr Sonam Tenzin, said that, after Sangay Wangdue withdrew from the post, the board had two options: to give it to Ngeema S Tshempo or to advertise the post again. “Since the company rule did not mention any of the two options, the board decided through a majority vote to readvertise the position hoping for more interested people to come forward,” he said.

Carving up the pay hike pie

The Pay Commission recommended a 77 percent to 40 percent pay hike for all civil servants, but the biggest beneficiaries of the hike will be non civil servants like the prime minister, members of parliament, cabinet ministers, heads of constitutional bodies and the members of the judiciary, many of whom will get more than 77 percent touching even 131 percent. A reliable source said that even government secretaries, who fall in the 77 percent category, are recommended a 1,200 percent increase in their allowances to match the top bracket. The Pay Commission’s recommendations had also originally proposed taxes on cars and luxury items to raise revenue apart from cost cutting. The government later decided to drop the tax proposal. The prime minister has been recommended the highest pay hike at a 131 percent and 35 percent allowance, taking his total salary from Nu 123,067 to Nu 241,000 per month. Following

closely behind are the cabinet ministers, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Speaker of National Assembly, National Council Chairperson with a 67% pay hike and 30% allowance, taking up to Nu 177,667 a salary of Nu 114,733. Members of parliament were recommended a 100% salary hike and 51% allowance hike, taking their total salary (Nu 30,000 salary and Nu 23,333 allowance) from Nu 53,333 to Nu 95,333. The posts of chairpersons of constitutional bodies like ACC, Audit, ECB will be getting a 106% salary hike and 1,450% allowance hike taking their previous Nu 34,970 salary to a new Nu 85,500.

Coming to terms with America

In America you have to look up more often. That is if you are a male under 5 feet 5 inches. A thick-soled pair of hush puppies might take that frame to near average stature at home. Here, it does little to heighten physical presence. Being vertically challenged can be a bit of a strain on the neck when making conversation and on the legs as well when rushing to the bus stop; everyone seems to get there quicker although you are literally running. Visitors cannot help wondering whether this has something to do with the servings of food – they are enormous. You need both hands to hold a medium sized drink. So you stuff yourself in an attempt not to waste food as the brain works out the ngultrum-dollar conversion. This, according to some people, is one reason why the visitor from a developing country tends to gain the pounds, overtime. The food is very rich, best seen in widespread obesity. Ordering a meal can be a mind-boggling experience. It's hard to catch the accent and understand what is being said and a desperate attempt on your side not to look like a fool. But it does not take long for the Bhutanese belly to crave for a 'real' meal – rice and chili. It drives you to walk the extra mile looking for that chili, which can give that familiar sensation from entry to exit. The urban American, in general, does not seem to spend a lot of time in the kitchen although most homes have spacious kitchens and bookstores sell numerous cookbooks. A lot of the food is readymade and many prefer to eat out on what Bhutanese may consider snack food.

Bhutan Post CEO post in limbo

This is still news to me," said Bhutan Post's chief executive officer select, Tseten Geltshen, responding to the Anti Corruption Commission's (ACC) revocation of his new appointment. Tseten Geltshen, former deputy secretary of the ministry of information and communication (MoIC), said that he did not receive any information about his appointment being "revoked" and was aware of it only after media coverage. "If my results were revoked, the government, which

issued the order, should have informed me," he said, adding that he was appointed by the government and was to join office starting October 1 as per the office order. At the moment, he said he was in the process of handing over the administrative responsibilities in his former ministry and would be assuming his Bhutan Post office next week. The appointment had come under scrutiny after one of the unselected candidates alleged in the media that the selection procedure held last month was flawed. "As per the announcement, I applied for the post, was called for an interview and selected. Later I received an order from the government to join, starting October 1," said Tseten Geltshen. The chairman of Bhutan Post board of directors and officiating secretary of MoIC ministry, Phala Dorji, said that it would be an unfortunate development if what media printed was true. "Then the integrity of the board of six panels is being questioned," he said. "We're all responsible members drawn from various organisations and whatever we did was collective and not a one man show where we could expect foul play." He said that all members of the board were called and questioned by ACC and every member had responded accordingly but was not served with a letter or verbal instruction about the "revocation".

Lifestyle diseases double risk of kidney failure

Diabetes and hypertension will become two of the major causes of kidney failure in Bhutan within the next ten years, say doctors. n developing countries like Bhutan today, infection however is still the major cause of kidney damage. But the rise of non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension has doubled the risk. I"If hypertension and diabetes are not tackled, they'll lead to kidney failure," said medical specialist and dialysis physician at the Thimphu referral hospital, Dr Tashi Wangdi. He said that about 60 percent of diabetics are likely to suffer from kidney failure. When the dialysis unit opened in Thimphu in 1998, there were only eight patients. , there are about 36 patients on dialysis. Dialysis is a process, which filters the blood of its toxic waste. Recognizing the attention kidney patients needed, the Thimphu referral hospital started a renal clinic about two weeks ago.

Strategic management for organisational success

A daylong executive seminar on "strategic management" conveyed the message that change is necessary and desirable in today's management system of public sectors. In an interactive session, where about 30 secretaries, dzongdags, directors and heads of corporate sectors participated, discussions focused on exploring strategies for better management. Dasho Dr Gado Tshering, who was the chief guest at the opening session, said that Bhutan was going through major changes in political, social, and economic dimensions, which demanded commensurate change in the system of management. "Strategic management should be combined with strategic leadership, which is crucial for the success of an organization or the government," he said. A participant pointed out that the government-controlled sectors were without defined

roles and responsibilities. “It should be a team approach with well defined roles and responsibilities of individual post. It shouldn’t be either a top-down or bottom-top approach to have an effective strategy,” said a participant, Pema Wangdi from the Bhutan Development Financial Corporation. According to the resource speaker, Deborah Blackman, associate professor of the University of Canberra in Australia, strategic management is all about long-term achievement and the overall strategy needed to achieve this goal. When asked if political change can affect the management system in public sectors, she said that the political figures and the public sectors should negotiate power for better management. “Political figures may want to get re-elected and, sometimes, there will be promises where a public sector may not be able to fulfill. Also, who makes the decision might change,” she said. The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) and the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) jointly, as a part of management development programme, organized the seminar.

India

Sadia Khanum

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Political front

Karat meets Left leaders

The CPI-M general secretary, Mr. Prakash Karat conferred with the CPI general secretary, Mr. AB Bardhan, and his senior colleagues on the current political situation, including the global

economic crisis and its impact on India. The CPI deputy general secretary, Mr. Sudhakar Reddy, and national secretary, Mr. D Raja, were also present during the discussions at the CPI headquarters. CPI sources said Mr. Karat discussed various issues on the eve of the CPI-M's three day Central Committee meeting in Kolkata from tomorrow. Mr Bardhan has been recovering from a recent operation. The National Integration Council meet on Monday, communal violence in Orissa and the likely alliances during the coming Assembly elections were among the issues discussed. The CPI-M has already declared its plan to "defeat the Congress, and reject the BJP" in the coming polls, aligning with regional parties which do not have any links with the two major parties. Commenting on the final signing of the Indo-US nuclear deal, Mr. Karat told a TV channel that inking of the 123 Agreement in the early hours of Saturday was "a black day in Indian history". Maintaining that the deal was a "big surrender before the US," Mr. Karat said it was "a big gain for the US and a big loss for India."

Advani lambastes UPA's policy on China

The BJP's prime ministerial candidate, Mr LK Advani flayed the UPA government over its inability to "emphatically" deal with China's claim over Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. Mr Advani who was in Pasighat, a Lok Sabha constituency in Arunachal Pradesh, addressed a Vijay Sankalp rally. He said: "All of Arunachal Pradesh including Tawang is and will forever remain an integral part of India". He said this had been amply corroborated by historical facts and should be made clear to "Chinese friends". He reiterated his party's demand for adoption of an unanimous resolution by Parliament on Arunachal Pradesh being an integral part of India. Two party Lok Sabha MPs from the state, Mr. Tapir Gao and Mr. Kiran Rijiju, were also present. The leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha said he welcomed India's increasing trade with China but ruled out any compromise on the country's unity and integrity. He sought to take on the UPA over its inept handling of infiltration from across the Bangladesh border and terrorism. He accused the Congress and its allies in the UPA of turning a blind eye to the two issues because of "vote bank considerations". He blamed the recent violence in Bodo areas of Assam on the "unchecked infiltration" by illegal Bangladeshi migrants. Mr. Advani stressed that whether it was the issue of Tawang, infiltration, terrorism and the latest economic crisis the UPA had proved to be a "disaster" for the country. "It (UPA government) must be thrown out in the next Lok Sabha elections, which are not far away", he said. He said the common man was reeling under a sense of economic insecurity and felt threatened by price rise. He claimed that only an NDA-led government at the Centre could bring succour to the common people.

Mamata 'helped' relocate Nano: CPM

The Trinamul Congress leader, Miss Mamata Banerjee, not only succeeded in driving Tata's Nano project out of West Bengal but "facilitated" its re-location in Gujarat, according to the CPI-M. An editorial in the forthcoming issue of the CPI-M mouthpiece, People's Democracy, said "being the loyal steadfast ally of the BJP in the NDA, she (Mamata) facilitated the project's re-location to Gujarat." The write-up said, "Remember, she continued to remain with the NDA and, thus, in a way endorsed the communal carnage unleashed in the state by the BJP's Narendra Modi government." The party maintained the Mamata-led agitation had the support of less than 10 per cent of the owners of the acquired land who had not taken the

compensation cheques. The agitation had adversely affected "the future prosperity and improved livelihood for a large number of people in the area as well as the process of industrialization that would have generated greater employment opportunities", it said. The editorial said the CPI-M had, in the last Assembly elections, "received a massive mandate to carry out rapid industrialization on the basis of the consolidation of land reforms," and the current opposition was in fact "a negation of the people's mandate". Answering criticism that the Left Front government failed to provide adequate security, forcing the Tatas to leave Singur, the party journal said, "That is not the reason, as Ratan Tata himself has stated as the reason for the Nano project to leave." "Indeed, adequate protection was provided and the state government was discharging its responsibilities towards the maintenance of law and order. The Tatas, however, took a stand that unless everybody cooperates, they are not going to continue to remain in Singur," the editorial said. "One can, surely, disagree with such a position. For, after all, no one can say that they shall build their house in a locality only when all others living there will give an assurance that their house will not be burgled. However, like Mamata Banerjee, the Tatas also have an equal right to take an unreasonable position," the party journal said.

Congress attacks Mayawati's move

The Congress accused Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati of indulging in "petty politicking" by cancelling the allotment of land for a rail coach factory at Rae Bareli and announced that party president Sonia Gandhi would visit her constituency as scheduled. Welcoming the order of the Allahabad High Court that the land should not be transferred to the Gram Samaj, AICC general secretary Digvijay Singh, who is in charge of party affairs in the State, described Ms. Mayawati's move as "injudicious" and said her action was not understood since there were no agitations whatsoever against the project. "It is a politically motivated move and it is not expected of Ms. Mayawati to take such action," Mr. Singh said at the party headquarters, after the decision of the High Court became known. Mr. Singhvi said the project was approved in the 2006-07 budget with a capacity to produce 1,000 coaches a year. The project would have given direct employment to at least 10,000 people. Of the total 1,238 acres, land measuring 467 acres was with the government and 800 acres belonged to private parties and the panchayat. The indent for the land was issued once in July last and then again in August. The Congress said that in June there were reports in media that the government was in the process of cancelling the land allotment by converting it into gram sabha holding, which made it mandatory for clearance by the District Magistrate. Mr. Singhvi said that if State governments started cancelling such Central projects because of political malafides, the "entire federal structure will be at stake." If the Centre, which gave nearly 43 per cent of funds to the States, started playing favourites "where would development of India go?"

Fight terrorism & communal violence firmly, says NIC

While expressing concern at communal violence and terror attacks in various parts of the country, the National Integration Council resolved to preserve and protect at all costs the foundations of secularism, equality, justice — social, economic and political — and fraternity among all communities. After a day-long meeting here, chaired by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the NIC adopted a six-point resolution which condemned all acts of violence, and covert and overt attempts to strike at the roots of the country's "national integrity, solidarity and pluralism. It decided to deal with all forms of extremism, terrorism and violence firmly and in accordance with the rule of law. The 14th meeting of the NIC recognised that unity in diversity and communal harmony constituted the bedrock of "our nationhood and civilisational values. Preserving this unique heritage is the challenge of our times and the bounden duty of every citizen." In his

closing remarks, Dr. Singh expressed satisfaction over the "broad consensus" at the meeting on the need to contain communal discord and violence, protect minority rights, and uphold the ideals of nationalism, secularism, inclusiveness and non-violence.

CPI(M) demands strong action against Bajrang Dal

The CPI(M) demanded strong action against Bajrang Dal under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act accusing the outfit of resorting to terrorist violence. "The Bajrang Dal has been spearheading attacks on the Christian community and its involvement in terrorist violence through the manufacture of bombs and placing of explosives have come to light, the latest being in Kanpur," CPI(M) General Secretary Prakash Karat told a press conference here at the end of the party's three-day central committee meeting. He alleged the Naveen Patnaik government in Orissa had 'totally failed' to curb attacks on Christians and nab the perpetrators who belonged to Hindutva outfits. The central government too failed to effectively intervene to protect the minorities in Kandhamal, Karat charged. Karat said there was a growing sense of alienation among the people with the failure of the state to check violence against the minorities and to render justice. He accused the BJP-RSS combine of instigating communal violence with the forthcoming assembly and Lok Sabha elections in mind.

Centre flayed for spurt in violence

The Bharatiya Janata Party and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led the charge against the government at the National Integration Council (NIC) meeting, citing entirely different reasons for the spurt in communal and caste violence in the country. While the BJP blamed the increasing violence on "vote bank politics" and "lack of political will" to tackle terrorism, the CPI (M) said lack of land reforms, regional imbalances, majoritarian communalism giving rise to minority communalism and neo-liberal economic policies were responsible for socio-economic conditions that led to strife and conflict between various groups of people.

UPA government failed on all fronts: Advani

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha L.K. Advani has said that the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had failed on all fronts and surrendered the country's interests to the United States. Addressing a public function here in connection with the inauguration of the 'Prakshobha Yatra,' led by State Bharatiya Jana Yuva Morcha State president K. Surendran, Mr. Advani said the Manmohan Singh government had failed in maintaining internal security, checking unprecedented infiltration and corruption. Wondering how the government was going to face the people during the Lok Sabha elections, he said the India-U.S. nuclear deal was a surrender of the country's nuclear option. "If the Congress comes to you and tells that you will get nuclear energy only after 20 years, you should tell them that you will vote them after 20 years," Mr. Advani said. The government had surrendered to the U.S. the country's right to conduct nuclear test, he added.

Singur residents seek Governor's intervention

A delegation of Singur residents met Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi and submitted a memorandum seeking his intervention in bringing back the Tata Motors small car project to Singur. "We told the Governor about the hardship faced by the 11,000 farmers who have lost their land as well as their means of livelihood following Tata Motors' decision on relocation and urged him to take concrete steps to return back the project to the State," said Manas Ghosh,

secretary of the Singur-based Nano Bachao (Save Nano) Committee. Members of this committee were part of the delegation. Mr. Ghosh said the Governor sympathised with their cause and assured them to take up the issue with both the State government and the Opposition. He said: "The Governor asked us to meet Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and explain the situation to him."

Jet staff retrenchment widely condemned

The dismissal of the 1,900 employees by Jet Airways has received widespread condemnation with the main Opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), describing this as the tip of the iceberg and seeking to know whether the 'hire and fire' policy had been adopted by the government without bringing in a law. "The government should come out with a policy," BJP spokesperson Prakash Javadekar told reporters here on Thursday. He feared that there would be more job losses as a result of the economic slowdown.

Ban Bajrang Dal, Sri Rama Sena, demands Deve Gowda

The former Prime Minister and national president of the Janata Dal (Secular), H.D. Deve Gowda hit out at Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa for the continuing attacks on Christians and churches and called upon the Union government to impose a ban on the Bajrang Dal and the Sri Rama Sena. If the Chief Minister wished to come clean on the issue, he should order a probe into the anti-Christian violence by a sitting judge of the High Court, pay adequate compensation to affected families and institutions, and take urgent steps to bring to book the guilty including the police and administrative officials for their acts of omission and commission, Mr. Gowda said. The former Prime Minister said the Centre and the State government should take necessary steps to put an immediate halt to the ongoing forced conversions in Orissa. All steps should be taken to maintain the unity and integrity of the nation and safeguard the fundamental rights of the people.

NLD rejoins NDA; BJP, INLD to contest LS polls together

The Indian National Lok Dal today rejoined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance and announced that it will contest the coming Lok Sabha elections in Haryana in alliance with the BJP.INLD, the principal Opposition party in Haryana, had snapped ties with NDA in February 2004.Announcing the tie up here, BJP president Mr Rajnath Singh, senior BJP leader Mr LK Advani and INLD chief Mr Om Prakash Chautala said the main objective of the alliance was to push the Congress-led UPA out of power.The two parties did not mention about the number of seats they will contest in Haryana. "The alliance is not based on preconditions ... in 1998 too I had extended support to Atal Bihari Vajpayee without any conditions attached," said Mr Chautala.To a poser on the future of the alliance, Mr Rajnath Singh said: "INLD is an uncompromising, anti-Congress force the alliance will ensure that Congress is voted out of power."Mr Chautala claimed that Congress has vitiated the political atmosphere of the country. "We will together cleanse the atmosphere," he added.Mr Singh claimed that the INLD rejoining the NDA was only the beginning. "I had said months ago that the number (of allies) will increase," he said.

Liberalisation has affected national integration'

CPI-M veteran and former West Bengal chief minister Mr Jyoti Basu has told Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh that national integration had suffered due to "unbridled penetration of foreign capital" and policies of liberalization. Replying to an invitation to attend the National Integration

Council (NIC), Mr Basu told the Prime Minister that policies of liberalization had opened the economy to "marauding forays of multi-national corporations" and regional imbalances were growing. Mr Basu said national integration would have received strength if the Directive Principles of State Policy were implemented, and recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission were put into practice. The basic thrust of the political outlook, he said, must comprise land reforms, higher wages, more state intervention in agrarian, economic and financial sectors, defence of the public sector, and a strong defence of the rights of the socially and economically oppressed, and the minorities. The CPI-M veteran said "an important component of the move towards national integration would be a move away from a US-dominated foreign policy. According to Mr Basu, even communalisation had its roots in economic and social backwardness. "Mere reservations, necessary as they are, cannot prevent such a phenomenon from taking place without economic empowerment in particular," Mr Basu said. He said various reports on the plight of the minority communities were gathering dust. The communal menace could be fought through political will and administrative courage and commitment to secular values.

Mayawati woos Muslims with an eye on poll

In a bid to dent the traditional Muslim vote bank of Samajwadi Party ahead of Lok Sabha poll, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati announced a number of schemes, including setting up of an Arabic-Persian university here. "The government will establish an Arabic-Persian university in the state capital and we have allocated Rs 10 crore for the purpose. Besides, the number of madrassas on government grant list will also be increased from 360 to 460," Mayawati said addressing a national convention on the "Problems of Muslim Community: Reasons and Solutions" here.She also announced grant of Rs two crore to Waqf Board, establishment of unani medicine directorate, increased income limit for scholarships to minority students from Rs 18,700 to Rs one lakh and Manyawar Kanshiram employment scheme. The BSP chief also offered to set up a coaching institute for civil service aspirants from minority community and allocated Rs four crore for the purpose. Mayawati said, besides filling up of vacancies of Urdu teachers, the government would make arrangement of Urdu teaching in 964 primary and 1,212 higher secondary schools and open two new schools for girls. The grant of Rs one crore for marriage of girls of minority community would be raised to Rs 12 crore. The government would file an SLP (special leave petition) in the Supreme Court to ensure opening up of a minority institution, plan for which was at halt after a high court order on Aug 24, 2006.

Lankan war clouds UPA government's fate

The UPA government, which has survived a major threat over the Indo-US nuclear issue, is in imminent danger of collapsing within a fortnight, over the Sri Lankan Tamils issue, if it refuses to stop its military assistance to the island government and reverse its policy immediately, as the threat by parties in Tamil Nadu to quit Parliament, few days before the beginning of the monsoon session, seems to be real and serious. Among the 39 MPs from Tamil Nadu, only six members belonging to the CPI-M, CPI and MDMK had voted against the UPA government in the trust vote following the withdrawal of support by the Left parties. The other 33 MPs had voted in favour of the government. Even if the Congress high command managed to prevent its ten MPs from resigning, the government will lose its majority, if the members from the other parties resigned. he chances of the government's survival, in case of a no-confidence motion, will dim further, if the DMK MPs voted against the government, as demanded by MDMK leader Mr. Vaiko, whose

support in the issue was sought by Tamil Nadu chief minister Mr. M Karunanidhi, in the all party meeting. Reacting to the decision of the meeting, which his party boycotted, Mr Vaiko said that the DMK should warn the Centre that it would withdraw its support to the UPA government, while adding "sacrificing two MPs for the Sri Lankan Tamil cause is not a problem for the MDMK, which is ready to anything to protect the island Tamils". In his statement today, he said that India should get back the radars; it had supplied and withdraws the military personnel it had sent to assist the Sri Lankan military. He also demanded that the proposed loans to the island government and the agreement between the Indian and Sri Lankan navies for sharing intelligence should be cancelled immediately, besides the stopping the training being given in India to the Sri Lankan army and air force. He wanted the Union Ministers from Tamil Nadu to quit immediately, if the Centre did not put pressure on Sri Lanka to end the war. If the Sri Lankan government refused to listen to the Centre, Indian government should warn the island nation that diplomatic ties would be snapped and economic blockade would be imposed, Mr Vaiko said.

UPA's remarks on Ram Sethu attempt to hurt Hindus: BJP

The BJP today accused the UPA government of attempting to abuse and hurt Hindu sentiments by stating in the Supreme Court that there was no proof of Ram Sethu being a place of worship. "By stating before the Supreme Court that there is no proof that Ram Sethu is a place of worship or that it is an integral part of Hindu religion, the UPA has once again tried to abuse and hurt Hindu sentiments," party spokesperson Mr Ravi Shanker Prasad told reporters. Mr Prasad said the government had no right to define what forms an integral part of Hindu religion. "The government has taken upon itself the role to decide as to what is and what not an integral part of Hindu religion is. Who has given this authority to the UPA government?" Mr Prasad asked. Terming the language used in the affidavit "derogatory and designed to hurt Hindu sentiments", Mr Prasad said the government would never use such language against a symbol of reverence of any other religion. He demanded that the UPA should explain the basis of its contention made in the affidavit on Ram Sethu.

Domestic situation:

Trouble-torn Andhra town under curfew

Curfew continued in violence-hit Bhainsa town of Andhra Pradesh for the second consecutive day today with no fresh reports of any untoward incidents. "The situation is very much under control. No untoward incidents have been reported after yesterday's clashes," district collector Mr. Ahmed Nadeem told. "We have conducted peace committee meetings at various sensitive places of the town. Elders were also pacifying members of their communities," he said. Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC continue to be in force at Nirmal and Adilabad towns, the official said. Three persons were killed and 25 others, including eight policemen, injured in communal clashes between two groups that broke out in the town in Adilabad district. The violence erupted during Goddess Durga immersion procession when gulal (coloured powder) fell on a place of worship at Panjesha locality and on a man, who took objection to it, police said. Later, members of two communities indulged in stone pelting. Police used cane-charge and fired in the air to disperse the mob that went on a rampage setting vehicles and shops on fire. Curfew was imposed in Bhainsa, Nirmal and Adilabad to bring the situation under control. Adequate police force has been deployed to maintain law and order.

Additional personnel were being called in from Warangal and Karimnagar districts to assist the local administration, he said. Depending upon the situation, curfew will be relaxed in the next two days, the district collector said. Passes were issued to public in the sensitive areas to enable them to move, though people remained indoors in many localities fearing trouble. “We are estimating the property losses. A report will be sent to the government seeking compensation,” officials said.

Court: no bar on Nanavati preliminary report

The Supreme Court refused to restrain the Gujarat government from implementing, circulating or acting on the Justice Nanavati Commission report on the Godhra train carnage. A Bench consisting of Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan and Justices P. Sathasivam and Aftab Alam, however, asked the Gujarat government to respond to a petition, filed by Citizens for Justice and Peace, seeking a stay on circulation of the report on the ground that the Commission was not authorized to give its report in parts. The Chief Justice told senior counsel Rajinder Sachar, appearing for the NGO, that under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, there was no bar on the commission giving a preliminary report or making some recommendations. “The report is only a recommendation. The government may or may not act on it. Mr. Sachar, however, said the commission could not give a preliminary report and the government could only place an action taken report in the Assembly. If the report was circulated it would hurt communal harmony

Bandh hits normal life in south Orissa

Normal life was disrupted to some extent in five districts of south Orissa due to a dawn to dusk bandh call given by some Left parties and tribal organizations against the communal violence by the Sangh Parivar in Kandhamal district.This bandh call given in Kandhamal, Gajapati, Rayagada, Ganjam and Koraput districts of south Orissa by CPI (ML) (New Democracy), CPI (ML) (Liberation), SUCI and CPI (ML) (Samajwadi Jan Parishad). Tribal organisation Lok Sangram Manch (LSM) supported this bandh call. Activists of these organisations also held token protest demonstrations in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. No untoward incidents were reported during this bandh call.Movement of passenger vehicles was disrupted in major portions of all these districts. Activists disrupted train movement between Khurda road and Berhampur for over two hours in the morning through blockades near Rambha and Khallikote in Ganjam district. Roads were blocked near Aska and Bhanjanagar. In Ganjam district effect of the bandh was more evident in Sorada, Dharakote, Sanakhemundi and Shergarh blocks. The protesters took out a rally in Berhampur shouting slogans for communal amity and demanding action against the communal forces.

Maoists killed Lakshmanananda, say Orissa Police

The Crime Branch of Orissa police confirmed that Maoists had killed Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Lakshmanananda Saraswati in Kandhamal district by involving some local armed groups. The decision to eliminate the VHP leader was taken by the Central Committee of Communist Party of India(Maoist) about seven months ago, and a group of about six hardcore extremists killed the VHP leader at the Jalespata ashram in Kandhamal on August 23 evening. The extremists who committed the crime were armed with automatic weapons, including AK-47 rifles. The local youths also took part in the crime and stood guard around the ashram when the Maoists executed their plan. The youths belonged to about four different groups from nearby

villages, according to sources. The conspiracy to kill the VHP leader was hatched in the aftermath of the communal violence that took place in Kandhamal following an attack on the slain VHP leader on the eve of Christmas last year, sources said.

Family burnt alive in AP

Six persons of a family were burnt alive in Bhainsa in Adilabad district in the wee hours of the morning, bringing back to the boil the simmering communal tension in the area. A group of unidentified people torched the house at around 2 a.m, killing all its six inmates, police said. One of the victims was a two-year old baby. The dead are identified as Mahboob Khan, Naoman, Arsalan, Rizwana, Sifa Begum and two-year old Tuba Falak. The attack took place at Vatoli village, 10 km from Bhainsa town, where four people were killed in communal violence on Friday. Police said the inmates could not escape as the rioters had locked the house from outside.

Maharashtra wins the race in communal violence

India has registered 6464 incidents of communal violence since 2000 to September this year with Maharashtra topping the states with maximum number of such cases. The country witnessed 6464 incidents, including 693 incidents this year. While 2393 people were killed, about 21,077 people were injured in these violent incidents, a statement circulated at the National Integration Council meeting said. Maharashtra has witnessed 1046 incidents of communal violence in which 151 people have been killed and 4037 injured. However, casualty wise, Gujarat remains on the top of the list as 1092 people, including 977 alone in 2002, lost their lives and 4021 were injured due to riot clashes. Orissa, where attacks against Christians are continuing, has witnessed 309 such cases, including 158 incidents this year. Around 63 people have been killed, including 41 this year till September, it said.

Minister's son charged with raping 14-yr-old tourist

The elder son of Goa minister Mr Atanasio Monserrate was charged with raping a minor German girl in a case that also had a violent overtone after a social activist was attacked for apparently helping the victim's mother to get justice.In an embarrassment for the Congress-led coalition government, the state police booked 21-year-old Rohit for alleged sexual and mental abuse of the 14-year-old girl and was charged with offences including rape, abetment to crime and outraging her modesty.Mr Monserrate, who is the state's education minister and unattached

MLA of regional party UGDP, claimed his son was innocent and that he was not involved in the crime.

The police was hot on the trail of Rohit and were searching several bungalows where the accused could be possibly staying. Police said his arrest was imminent. The police action came after German researcher Ms Fadela Fuchs had complained on 2 October that her daughter was being mentally and sexually abused by Rohit, who also allegedly sent lewd text messages from his mobile.

Economic Front:

Foreign tourist numbers on the up

Despite the global economic slowdown and tourist advisories warning of terrorist activities in the country, the number of foreign tourists visiting India grew by over nine per cent last month, according to official figures. In all, 33, 0874 foreign tourists visited India during the month as compared to 301892 in 2007 and 297891 in 2006. Foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) thus grew by 9.6 per cent in September as compared to 1.3 per cent in 2007 as per figures released by the tourism ministry. "Growth rate of FTAs worldwide has been 5 per cent in 2008 and the average growth rate of Asia Pacific has been 6.9 per cent. But India's tourism sector has registered a growth of above 10 per cent in foreign tourist arrivals," a senior tourism ministry official said. Terming the latest figures as an "encouraging trend" for the tourism sector, tourism ministry officials said the total number of FTAs this year touched 3.87 million in September which is an increase of 10.4 per cent as compared to the previous year. India's foreign exchange earnings (FEE) from tourism sector in rupee terms have touched 36,464 crore during the same period with an increase of 17.8 per cent. India continues to be a long duration and high spending destination for foreign travelers. The foreign exchange earnings per foreign travelers coming to India has been US $2112 in 2007 which is more than twice the foreign exchange earned per foreign travelers worldwide (US $948) as well as Asia Pacific (US $1027). "Asian countries like China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand earn much less foreign exchange per foreign travelers as compared to India," an official said.

More steps to encourage fund inflows,

After easing external commercial borrowing norms, the government is preparing to unleash more measures to encourage capital inflows to ensure that liquidity crisis do not hit the Indian financial systems, says a top finance ministry official. "We have already done something in ECB. It is possible to do more as we go along. We will take more policy change to allow more capital inflows," Department of Economic Affairs secretary Mr Ashok Chawla said during an interview with a news channel. Asked about the effects of ongoing global financial crisis on India, he said: "India is not entirely shielded from the effects of what is happening in developed countries. The impact so far as India is concerned is indirect. "Our banks and financial institutions are not hit by what is happening in these countries. What is impacting us is that capital from these countries will see a dip because they have to handle their own funds," he said. In a bid to encourage flow of

fund, the government last month increased the overseas borrowing limit to $500 million for infrastructure companies. At the same time; it widened the ECB window by including mining and petroleum into infrastructure sector. Pinning hopes on action plan finalised by G-7, Mr Chawla said from the crisp, aggressive, five-point action plan finalised here, markets would take it as a sign of serious endeavor on part of the developed countries to proceed with setting their house in order.

Resolving financial meltdown: India asks IMF to take lead role

India has asked the International Monetary Fund to take the lead in resolving the financial meltdown to steer off possible recession, saying any delay in addressing liquidity concerns could cause solvency problems. "The recessionary trend is slowly becoming a reality with the twin threats of the financial markets crisis and consumer anxiety. crisis has triggered serious liquidity problems, with the money market interest rates shooting up. If not addressed with speed and determination, the prolonged liquidity concerns could turn into solvency problems, further jeopardizing the stability of the global financial system," finance minister Mr. P Chidambaram said in his formal statement to the International Monetary and Finance Committee.

Investments may be hit: Nath

While the Indian economy enjoyed strong fundamentals the global financial crisis may affect investment even though export targets would be met, the commerce and industry minister, Mr Kamal Nath said. "Because of the liquidity crunch globally, some investment in the future may be affected," Mr Nath said on the sidelines of the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) Business Summit. The minister, however, said the impact would be minimal. "At least for this year, we will achieve our target in excess of $35 billion in FDI inflows," he added. At the same time, exports would continue to grow by 30 per cent, including this month as well, he contended. On the rupee depreciating against the dollar due to continuous outflow of the currency, the commerce minister said: "I do not think it is permanent." The rupee is currently trading close to the 49 mark against the dollar. Echoing the finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram's views, he said the government did not believe in calibrating the rupee. "In India, we do not calibrate our exchange rate. The government should not intervene unless there are extraordinary and unnatural situations arising," he said.

Fundamentals of economy strong: CII

Following up on the five-point agenda presented on 8 October, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has come up with another set of recommendations to strengthen the sentiments of the economy and to address the liquidity situation. "Though the fundamentals of the economy are sound, the current situation emanating out of poor liquidity situation and low sentiments, mandates some further action," the CII said.

Rupee down by 43 paise

A sudden spurt in demand for US dollar cut short the two-day winning streak of Indian rupee which closed the day at 48.52/53, weaker by 43 paise, against the greenback. Foreign Exchange (forex) dealers said overseas banks made hectic dollar purchases in the Non-Delivery Forwards amid sustained capital outflows in stock markets, thus affecting greenback supply in the market. The domestic currency resumed weak at 48.38/40 a dollar and later moved in the range between 48.37 and 48.62 during the day. It had closed at 48.09/10 a dollar.Traders said a sudden dollar buying spree blocked the rupee's two-day winning streak as there was virtually no support from the central bank.

More steps to combat crisis

As the Indian capital market upturned a two-day gain to enter a bear hug once more, the finance minister, Mr P Chidambaram announced more measures to infuse liquidity in the system and further strengthen the banking sector, while doubling FII investment limit in the corporate bond market. “The details of the capitalisation scheme are being worked out.” He pointed out CRARs of Indian banks were well above the BASEL norm of eight per cent and RBI-stipulated norm of nine per cent. In the face of the flight of capital from the stock markets, a major factor that led to a meltdown at the bourses, Mr Chidambaram doubled the investment limit for FIIs in corporate bond market to $6 billion. “The market regulator Sebi has informed me that it'll address any request for relaxation in the proportion of investment in equity and debt required to be maintained by an FII under current regulation,” he said. As part of efforts to address the concern of industry and borrowers that they are not squeezed because of the crisis, Mr Chidambaram said the government is issuing an advisory to public sector banks to ensure easy draw-down against sanctioned limit and prompt appraisal of request for enhancement of credit limit. Giving details of the disbursal of the first instalment of the debt waiver scheme, the finance minister said as much as Rs 7,500 crore would be made available to commercial banks and the remaining Rs 17,500 crore to apex agriculture bank, Nabard. “There will be no requirement of providing collateral,” he added. With the release of the farm debt waiver scheme, the cash-starved banking system would get around Rs 1,05,000 crore in aggregate through various measures announced by the government and the RBI in the past fortnight.

5 per cent import duty on steel likely

Steel minister Mr Ram Vilas Paswan said that the government would consider imposing a five per cent import duty on cheaper shipments and scrapping exports levy of up to 15 per cent as demanded by industry majors like Tata and SAIL. “It is a matter of survival for our steel firms. Tata, SAIL, Essar Steel, Ispat have individually met me and have suggested scrapping existing export duty and imposing a five per cent import duty, amid falling international steel prices. We will consider their demands when we meet them,” Mr Paswan told reporters. The ministry will hold a meeting with the domestic steel producers on 17 October and is expected to take a decision on these matters. He said that domestic steel production may take a hit due to the slump in demand amidst the global financial crisis and added that measures to guarantee timely completion of various steel projects would be discussed in the meeting.

EU, G-8 want India in crisis meet

Leaders of the European Union and Group of Eight major industrial countries want India to join in an emergency global summit to devise strategies to tackle the global financial crisis and overhaul the world's financial system. At the EU summit that ended in Brussels, France, the current chairperson of the rotating presidency of the 27-nation bloc, and the UK pushed for participation of emerging economic powers like India and China in the global finance summit expected to be held in New York sometime next month. A joint statement released by the White House said the leaders of the Group of Eight wealthy powers (G-8) ~ the USA, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Canada and Russia would meet “at an appropriate time in the near future.” The statement indicated that the G-8 nations would include other major nations in the discussions, which are to be aimed at drafting “an agenda for reforms to meet the challenges of the 21st century.” British Premier Mr. Gordon Brown said the meeting devoted to a complete overhaul of the financial system could be held as early as November. He said the discussions "to take common action... for very large and very radical changes” should include not only the world's richest nations but also such major emerging economies as China and India.

Think-tanks see lower GDP growth

Both the NCAER and CMIE have lowered their GDP growth projection for the fiscal year 2008-09. Economic think-tank NCAER slashed GDP growth projection to 7.6 per cent from the earlier forecast of 7.8 per cent for the current fiscal, even after the government tried hard to ease money supply in the system to tide over the effects of global financial crisis. “Taking into account changes in the key parameters of the economy since the previous forecast in July, we

have revised our projections for the fiscal 2008-09," the think tank said in the latest quarterly review.

As the recent events have shown, Indian economy cannot be immune to the global developments, whether it is the oil price shocks, food price shocks or the financial market shocks, it said.

Reposing faith in the fundamentals of Indian economy the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh last week had said: "Economy will grow by 7.5-8 per cent this fiscal. There is no question of a recession. "The Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council has projected a growth of 7.7 per cent for 2008-09 against the more than nine per cent growth posted in the last fiscal. During the first quarter of the current fiscal, the economy registered a growth of 7.9 per cent. However, industrial growth crashed to 1.3 per cent in August, raising fears that overall growth may be impacted. The overall macroeconomic scenario for 2008-09 is one of slower growth as compared with the experience of the last three years, it said, adding the inflation rate is significantly higher than the experience of the past eight years. The reasons for the deceleration in growth are evident from the slowdown in private consumption expenditure and the drop in overall investment spending, it said. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has reduced its GDP growth forecast for the financial year 2008-09 to 8.7 per cent from 9.4 per cent earlier.

"Our downward revision comes at a time when the financial markets are in turmoil. However, our revision is not entirely because of the turmoil," the CMIE said in its monthly review here today.

The revision reflects some stress in the real estate sector and a slowdown in the implementation of investment projects, CMIE said. The Indian equity markets fell the most in January 2008. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have repatriated $16.2 billion since February. Besides, interest rates and inflation have been high for several months now. During this period of capital flight and tight liquidity, the Indian economy did quite well. The GDP grew by an impressive 7.9 per cent in the first quarter of FY'09. Exports grew by a robust 35 per cent in dollar terms till August in spite of global gloom. Imports also grew by 38 per cent in dollar terms till August, partly because of high petroleum prices, it said. Direct tax collection grew by 33 per cent till September reflecting rising income and profits while bank credit was up by a robust 26 per cent as of 12 September. FDI inflows grew to $14.8 billion till August compared to $6.4 billion during the corresponding period last year. Corporate sector sales also grew by 35 per cent in first quarter of financial year 2009, rubbishing claims of an industrial growth slowdown.

Sensex down 674 points

It was a dreadful session for the markets, as benchmark indices have given up 70-75% gain, which they had seen in first two days of this week. It seemed that markets fizzled out two days pullback rally due to bad global cues, wherein financial stability is still big concern for global

banks. Asian and European markets have witnessed huge selling pressure. The Sensex has closed below 10,900 and the Nifty tanked below 3350. Redemption pressure has led this sell off. Incremental flows are negative at FII desk; selling in metal pack continues. A leading foreign fund has turned negative on the metal sector. L&T has failed to impress street by its second quarter numbers; entire capital goods space is under pressure post results. Midcap and small cap stocks are still vulnerable to margin call pressure. Finance minister Mr P Chidambaram said that the inter-bank lending still remains constrained and that it was important to enhance credit limits. The government and the Reserve Bank of India have agreed that measures have to be taken immediately, he said. RBI is going to announce some measures in the evening to ease liquidity in financial system; experts feel that this news would be good for tomorrow's gap up opening. But nervousness in global markets due to financial instabliity could nullify RBIs move. Liquidity concerns have taken a centrestage, a high-powered panel of bankers met in Mumbai to assess the needs to boost credit flow and the announcement is likely shortly.

Geo-strategic developments:

Unprecedented' N-deal to transform Indo-US ties

Silencing sceptics in both countries, India and the US have signed the 123 civil nuclear pact after over three years of intense diplomatic and political debate - a historic move that will restore nuclear trade and transform ties between the once estranged democracies. The landmark deal signed Friday (Saturday morning India time) will allow India access to nuclear reactors, fuel and technologies from the US after a gap of 34 years. Washington had terminated nuclear cooperation with India back in 1974 after New Delhi conducted a nuclear test in the Pokhran desert in Rajasthan. The deal also marks a paradigm shift in relations between India and the US, which were marked by mutual distrust and suspicion till a turnaround warming of ties began around 2000. India's external affairs minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee and US Secretary of State Ms Condoleezza Rice inked the bilateral 123 agreement at an elegant ceremony in the Benjamin Franklin Room of the State Department at 4.16 p.m. Friday (1.46 a.m. Saturday India time). "This is truly an historic occasion," said Ms Rice before signing what she called an "unprecedented" agreement that makes a one-time exception for India, which has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to resume nuclear trade with Washington while retaining its strategic programme.

"Civilian nuclear sector must be transparent"

As the government continues with the civilian nuclear programme and seeks to expand it, "it must respect the imperatives of safety, health, transparency, accountability and environment sustainability," the Coalition of Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) said. Releasing a statement at a press conference here, Mr. Bidwai and Anil Chaudhary said other sources of energy, especially environmentally sound renewable sources amenable to decentralized use, must

be promoted on a priority basis. As the government was pushing ahead with its civil nuclear programme, there was need for extensive and radical reform of legal and practical arrangements concerning the planning, appraisal and approval of power projects and their regulation in respect of safety, transparency and related matters. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board must be made independent of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), and baseline epidemiological surveys must be carried out in areas before commencing new uranium mining activity. A regular process of health monitoring should be put in place. The government should replace the 1962 Atomic Energy Act with new legislation, separating the civilian sector to ensure maximum transparency in its functioning and accountability. For, the current arrangement disallowed any question on the nuclear programme, with the DAE empowered to deny information even to Parliament. Simultaneously, the Right to Information Act should be made applicable to the civilian nuclear energy sector and punitive measures must be in place to cover conceivable contingencies and a range of compensation measures.

India to focus on time-bound projects with Russia, France & USA

With the historic signing of 123 agreement with the USA, India now will focus on time-bound projects with that country as well as France and Russia under the technical cooperation for the expansion of its nuclear power.The signing of the 123 Agreement with the USA is an enabling step to move forward in the expansion of nuclear power in the country. But India along with these three countries has to carry out a lot of diplomatic and technical procedures concurrently to operationalise the agreements, Chairman, Atomic Energy commission, Dr Anil Kakodkar. Several steps, including ratification of these agreements, commercial negotiations and IAEA safeguards, have to be carried out, he said.India will first put Tarapur units 1 and 2, Rajasthan units 1 and 2 and Koodankulam units 1 and 2 that are already under separate safeguards agreement with IAEA under the single umbrella of India specific safeguards agreement, Dr Kakodkar said.

Indo-US naval exercise this month

The 12th of the series of the annual Indo-US naval exercise Malabar gets underway later this month on the Arabian Sea with 15 ships from the two countries participating in it as part of the India-USA Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation signed in 2006. The exercise assumes significance as it comes soon after the two countries signed the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal. The thrust of the exercise this year would be Surface to Air Operations, Advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Surface Firings, VBSS (Visit Board Search and Seizure) and Submarine Operations. The Malabar series of exercises begun in 1992 includes diverse activities, ranging from gun-firing and fighter combat operations from aircraft carriers, to combating the scourge of terror, through Maritime Interdiction Operations exercises. In the upcoming exercise, the US Navy will be represented by the Ronald Reagan Strike Group (RRSG) of the 7th Fleet which is based at Yokosuka, Japan. The RRSG will include USS Ronald Reagan, a nuclear powered aircraft carrier, USS Chancellors Ville, USS Gridley, USS Decatur, USS Thach and USS Bridge, an underway replenishment tanker. In addition, one submarine, USS Springfield and one P3C Orion aircraft will also participate in the exercise.

SA ready to sell uranium to India

South Africa expressed its willingness to sell uranium to India. This was stated unequivocally by the South African President, Mr Kgalema Motlanthe, at the end of the third India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Summit.

Kashmir

PM visit: 1 killed, several injured in Srinagar

One person was killed and several others, including security men, were injured in heavy stone pelting by an unruly mob in Srinagar during protests called to coincide with Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's visit to the Kashmir Valley. Protesters resorted to stone pelting at the police and paramilitary forces in the old city's Nowhatta area, four km from city centre Lal Chowk, after the Friday prayers. The police initially used batons and tear smoke shells to quell the mob, but were forced to resort to firing rubber bullets when they failed to bring the situation under control, resulting in the death of one protester. "One protester has succumbed to rubber bullet injuries in Nowhatta, while several security men have been wounded in the heavy stone pelting by the mob," a senior police officer told IANS here. Dr Manmohan Singh was holding a meeting with leaders of mainstream political parties in summer capital Srinagar when violent protests erupted at some places in the city, coinciding with his visit. Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh is on a two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir amid tight security. He also inaugurated the Baglihar hydel power station. By pressing a button, he commissioned the first unit of 450 megawatt Baglihar dam, built on the Chenab River flowing from Jammu and Kashmir into Pakistan. The dam has remained a point of contention between India and Pakistan with Pakistan raising objections regarding its design and the size. The PM is going to face the heat from the 300 families living in Pul Doda township the catchments area of the dam. They say that the process of their relocation that started eight years back has not been completed so far. Six kilometers from Doda city, the township will be totally submerged by the water of the Baglihar dam.

EC decision on J&K polls likely soon

The full Election Commission held a meeting to prepare a roadmap for assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir. The Commission has not taken any final decision on the assembly elections, but it is seriously contemplating the home ministry's suggestion of a four-phased poll so that the state administration does not have any problems in providing security forces. The Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. N Gopalaswami, discussed the possible date for the assembly elections in the valley with Election Commissioners, Mr. Navin Chawla and Mr. SY Quraishi. EC officials said no decision has been taken on the dates for the elections but added

that they would be announced soon. “May be next week,” they said. The Commission assessed the situation in the state and discussed the inputs given by the home ministry, state government and various other security agencies, an EC official said. Senior officials of the Commission had gone on a two-day tour to the Kashmir valley and met senior civil and police officials in the state to take stock of poll preparations. They also met political parties’ leaders and sought their views on the assembly elections. Most of the political parties have reportedly opined against immediate assembly elections claiming that the present atmosphere was not conducive for polls. The political parties, however, said they would go by the decision of the Commission.

J&K poll: EC to meet Chief Secretaries of six States

The Election Commission has called a meeting of Chief Secretaries of six States to ascertain whether they could make available 4,000-5,000 Urdu-speaking government employees for poll duty in Jammu and Kashmir. Commission sources said an announcement of the election schedule would depend on the availability of personnel and a decision would be taken soon after consulting the Chief Secretaries of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. The Commission wanted to put in place a contingency plan in the event of government staff in Jammu and Kashmir not being able to offer their services for poll duty for some unexpected reasons. The Centre already indicated that it would make available adequate security forces for the elections. The sources said that once the issue of poll personnel was resolved, the Commission would hold another round of talks with the State Chief Electoral Officer and an announcement would be made thereafter.

18 injured in J&K clash

At least 18 people, including seven security personnel, were injured today in fresh clashes that erupted during protests against the killing of two youths in police .Though, the administration imposed restrictions in many parts to thwart any untoward incident, normal activities resumed in the valley after two days of a strike called by separatists against the visit of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to the state. Violent clashes also rocked Nowhatta and adjoining localities for the third day today, the sources said. Reinforcements have been rushed to violence-hit areas and prohibitory orders banning assembly of four or more persons are being reimposed to defuse the “tense situation”.

Social front

A ‘living Sati’

While flood victims protest inadequate food supplies, a woman from a flood-prone district in Bihar has been surviving on a few cups of lemon tea per day for close to three decades. Meet Mrs Kiran Devi, a middle-aged widow of Srirampur village under Hajipur block of Vaishali district, who, villagers claim, has not eaten solid food for the last 28 years. She only needs a few cups of lemon tea to get ready to complete the daily household chores and experience another day. Known as chai-wali chachi, she prefers lemon tea to milk tea and devotes most of her time offering prayers to God who, she said, has not done justice to her. The bizarre change in her life

came after her husband Upendra Singh died in 1980, barely six months after their wedding. The news of her husband's death caused her such mental agony that she instantly went into a coma. When she regained consciousness after a fortnight, she found she had lost her appetite which has continued to this day. "I get irritated after seeing food. I hate food," she said. "There is no meaning in eating tasty dishes when my husband is not around." Reports said her family members brought her to medical experts in Patna and also got her admitted to AIIMS in New Delhi yet there has been no improvement in her condition.The local deputy mukhiya of Manua panchayat in Hajipur block Mrs Anjum Ara described her case as another facet of Sati and said she was viewed as a miracle by local villagers. "Although she didn't sit on her husband's burning funeral pyre and end her life, she has been burning everyday by choosing not to eat food. She is a living Sati," Mrs Ara told The Statesman today. She said the entire village is amazed at how she has managed to live on only lemon tea.

Women more prone to heart diseases'

"Women are more prone to heart diseases than men, though the problem does not get diagnosed at early stages," said J.P.S. Sawhney, consultant cardiologist with Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi, addressing over 400 medical practitioners at Prime Continued Medical Education (CME 2008) here over the weekend. Dr. Sawhney said women fear cancer more than cardio-vascular diseases (CVD), which is why not many women take symptoms such as chest pain seriously. "CVD are the biggest cause of death among women in the U.S. and the trend is equally alarming in developing nations, with India taking the lead due to its altered lifestyle," Dr. Sawhney said.

Sort out differences on legalising homosexuality, PM tells Ministries

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has asked Home Minister Shivraj Patil and Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss to sit together and sort out the controversial issue of legalizing homosexuality. "Prime Minister has directed the two Ministers to sit together and discuss the matter and sort out differences," Science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal told journalists after a meeting of the Union Cabinet. He said the Cabinet deferred a decision on the issue. The Delhi High Court is hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition challenging the legality of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which bans sexual relations among people of the same gender. The government would go by whatever the court decided. The court had on pulled up the Centre for relying on religious texts to justify the prohibition on gay sex and asked it to come up with scientific reports instead. The issue has become controversial with Dr. Ramadoss saying that he would take up the matter with the Prime Minister after the Home Ministry opposed the Health and Family Welfare Ministry's stand before the court. The Home Ministry has suggested that gay sex be not decriminalized on moral grounds, while the Health and Family Welfare Ministry has proposed abolition of the penal provision for such acts. The Health and Family Welfare Minister had sought legalization of homosexuality arguing that it can help in better treatment of people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

India has 200 million hungry people: report

Punjab, the granary of India, ranks below countries like Honduras and Vietnam in terms of hunger levels while Madhya Pradesh has the most severe level of hunger in the country, followed by Jharkhand and Bihar, says a report prepared by U.S.-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in collaboration with Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide, California. “When Indian States are compared to countries in the 2008 Global Hunger Index, Madhya Pradesh ranks between Ethiopia and Chad. Punjab, the best-performing State, is below Gabon, Honduras and Vietnam,” says the Country Report released here on Tuesday by G.K. Chadha, member of Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council, on the eve of World Food Day. “India is home to the world’s largest food insecure population, with more than 200 million people who are hungry,” the India State Hunger Index (ISHI) said. The country’s poor performance is driven by its high levels of child under-nutrition and poor calorie count. “Its rates of child malnutrition are higher than most countries in sub-Saharan Africa,” the report said. India, which scored 66th place in the 2008 Global Hunger list of 88 countries, does not have a single State in the ‘low hunger’ or ‘moderate hunger’ categories. Despite years of robust economic growth, India scored worse than nearly 25 sub-Saharan African countries and all of South Asia, except Bangladesh. “Figuring amongst the 88 countries itself is shameful for the country. Policy-makers have to think about it. High GDP growth is not sufficient. Inclusive growth is necessary. The country has a poor record on distribution of wealth,” Dr. Chadha said.The India State Hunger Index measures hunger on three leading indicators and combine them into one index. The three indicators are: prevalence of child malnutrition, rates of child mortality, and the proportion of people who are calorie deficient. This approach is similar to the 2008 Global Hunger Index, which includes India, and was also released for World Food Day on October 16. The ISHI found that 12 States fell in the ‘alarming’ category, and one State – Madhya Pradesh – fell in the ‘extremely alarming’ category. Four States – Punjab, Kerala, Haryana and Assam – were in the ‘serious’ category. India’s slightly better performance relative to Bangladesh is entirely due to better access to food in India, which in turn is a consequence of India’s higher agricultural productivity. On the other two components of the Global Hunger Index – child underweight and child mortality – India ranks below Bangladesh. In a few States, such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, calorie deficiency contributes almost as much as child underweight. The report identified that strong economic growth does not necessarily translate into lower hunger levels. Even States with high rates of economic growth in recent years, such as Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra, have high levels of hunger, while States with relatively slower economic growth, such as Punjab, achieved a lower hunger level. “Hunger and malnutrition are often rooted in poverty,” said Ashok Gulati, IFPRI director in Asia. “Part of the solution rests with increasing investments in agriculture and poverty reduction programmes.”

Foreign Relations

Check ceasefire violations, India tells Pakistan

India conveyed its concerns to Pakistan over ceasefire violations and the continuing infiltration of militants into Jammu & Kashmir and pointed out that these irritants, if left unchecked, would not contribute to on-going efforts to improve bilateral ties. Pakistan, on the other hand, expressed its desire for closer relations with India and suggested the need to wrap up talks on a couple of territorial disputes and avoid creating fresh ones such as over the management of waters of rivers flowing through both countries. During talks between National Security Adviser M. K. Narayanan and his Pakistani counterpart Mahmud Ali Durrani here, India is also understood to have raised the issue of the bombing of its embassy in Afghanistan in which the hand of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence is suspected. The two NSAs also discussed the possibility of taking measures to totally curb instances of firing on the Line of Control and the International Border with Pakistan. A day before Gen. Durrani meets Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon, India was confident that all of its concerns would be addressed. "We will discuss all the issues that concern us. Naturally, that includes what happened in Kabul, which includes the situation in terms of maintaining the ceasefire. We will do that," Mr. Menon told journalists. Sources here said Gen. Durrani, a votary of dialogue to resolve disputes, is on an exploratory mission to understand India's response to resolving the Sir Creek and the Siachen disputes. India acknowledges that the Sir Creek dispute was a "cartographer's problem" and that Independence converted it from a district-level dispute to an international one. Siachen too, India feels, can be resolved and it is a matter of trusting each other's assurances.

We can make borders irrelevant: PM

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told a press conference that good relation with Pakistan, "Our very important neighbour to the North is an essential part of our policy." "My vision of India-Pakistan relations is that both countries situate their bilateral relations in a cooperative framework of mutual understanding. We seek the normalization of our relations with Pakistan, a solution of all issues that cause estrangement, including Jammu and Kashmir through dialogue and peaceful negotiations in an atmosphere free of violence. While we cannot change borders, we can make them irrelevant," he said. "When I met President Zardari in New York recently, I invited Pakistan to work with us to usher in a new era of sub-continental cooperation."

India worried about civilian sufferings, says Pranab

India said the situation in Sri Lanka remained a matter of grave concern and that it was worried about the effect of the continuing conflict on civilians caught up in circumstances not of their making. "It is essential that their rights be respected, that they be immune from attacks, and that food and other essential supplies be allowed to reach them," External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said in a statement here. Mr. Mukherjee said New Delhi had consistently made it clear that normality could not be brought about by military means or battlefield victories. What was required was a peacefully negotiated political settlement which allowed each community to realize its potential within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. The Government of India, he stressed, would do all in its power to achieve this goal to ameliorate the humanitarian conditions in Sri Lanka and had been making representations to Colombo at several levels. Mr. Mukherjee emphasized that harassment and killing of Indian fishermen in neighbouring areas must stop forthwith and said the government would take steps to ensure this.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

ASIA REPORT

October 29, 2008

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BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

SOUTH & EAST ASIA and GCC & Fertile Crescent

Nadia Tasleem

Weekly Report from 18 October to 24 October 2008

Presentation: 28 October 2008

The report is comprised of three parts. First part is based on the review of news items focusing on political, economic, social and geo-strategic developments in various regions namely; South Asia, East Asia, GCC and Fertile Crescent from 18 October to 24 October as have been collected by interns; while second part of the report is based on review of four articles, in context of GCC. Third part however gives brief description of various research institutes working in East Asia or focusing on the respective region.

PART I

Summary

South Asia:

Political Front:

To begin with ***Bangladesh*** political front holding of elections in time seems to be major concern of political activists, academicians, professionals and civil society. Meanwhile BNP remained stick to its stand of boycotting elections under emergency rule. In ***Srilanka*** LTTE launched an attack against merchants' ship with humanitarian aid to Tamil people of Jaffna Peninsula. Meanwhile Srilankan Foreign Minister has urged expatriates in Australia to get united to for the betterment of their homeland. People in ***Maldives*** consider free and fair elections to be the best way to bring stability and harmony. First phase of election that ended smoothly has been appreciated by India however Election Commission has received complaints about irregularities in elections. Integration of Maoist Army into Nepali Army (NA) remains a potent issue being faced by ***Nepali*** government as recent meeting between main four parties to settle this issue failed to develop consensus. Meanwhile Constituent Assembly secretariat has finally prepared a schedule on constitution making. Amidst governments' effort to build peace with Terai tribes; Terai tribes have accepted the responsibility of recent blast hitting eight people in Janakpur. In ***Myanmar*** an upbeat Burmese military junta sponsored Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) in Kachin State has recently launched a series of campaigns to start its preparations for the 2010 general elections.

India:

At Indian political front preparations of upcoming state assembly elections, elections in Kashmir, domestic unrest and nuclear deal emerged as significant issues. BJP is looking forward to win elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Chattishgarh in order to acquire a strong base for National Assembly elections next year. Opposition parties however have declared it to be a tough task. Meanwhile Congress and BJP have welcomed Election Commission's decision to hold elections in Jammu & Kashmir. Hurriyat Conference however has announced to boycott elections. On the issue of atrocities against Christian minorities Congress assured to put efforts to build their confidence. Besides that unrest at domestic front led government to take various measures to bring stability. Meanwhile 12 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed during Maoists attack in Chattishgarh. At nuclear front India has to wait for completion of certification at all scales to start nuclear trade.

Geo-strategic Front:

The US has also assured to send 120 observers to monitor elections in ***Bangladesh***. All the while European Union has decided to send a group of experts to Bangladesh in order to discuss issue of lifting or relaxing emergency. India has urged ***Srilankan*** government to settle Tamils' issue being responsible for all citizens of the country. India and ***Nepal*** have agreed to amend their bilateral treaty within 3 months. Meanwhile China, the US and Egypt have called Nepali PM to hold diplomatic talks. Australia has further extended sanctions against ***Myanmar***. Likewise India has started planning to seal border with Myanmar amidst recent blasts in Northeast India. ***India*** and Pakistan have restarted trade across LoC. Meanwhile China has admired Indian rise.

Social Front:

Absence of job security in ***Bangladeshi*** garment factories has led many workers to leave jobs. Likewise use of infected blood by blood banks as also emerged as worrisome issue in the country. Government of ***Maldives*** has been accused for mistakes in Dhivehi translation of the Holy Quran. Muslim scholars however called those mistakes to be unintentional. Meanwhile Maldivian Youth has launched campaign for real reforms in the country. Issue of identification of real flood victims in ***Nepal*** has hampered government's efforts to provide relief packages to them. The US awarded a young democracy activist of ***Myanmar*** with "2008 President's International Democracy Award". Meanwhile brutality and oppression of military junta has led more than 66,000 people to flee their homes.

Economic Front:

World Bank and IMF have assured that financial aid to ***Bangladesh*** won't be reduced amidst financial crisis. Meanwhile issue of raising value of taka against US dollar has been raised in various circles. Lastly government has promised to reduce oil price within a week. Growing food prices seem to be the most significant issue in ***Srilanka***. ***Maldivian*** State Trading Organization (STO) has lowered prices of diesel and petrol from Rf.14.75 to Rf.14.25 and Rf 13.75 to Rf 13.50 respectively. France, US and Asian Development Bank have given huge amounts of economic aids to ***Nepal***. ***Myanmar*** has lifted ban on export of rice after five months in the aftermath of Nargis cyclone. Drop in rubber prices has created adverse impact on farmers in Myanmar. At ***Indian*** economic front investors have lost Rs 2 trillion because of unstable and week economy.

East Asia:

Political Front:

At ***Indonesian*** political front a grenade exploded at the headquarters of the former Free Aceh Movement guerrilla fighters in the capital of Indonesia's restive Aceh province. Opposition party in ***Malaysia*** claimed that ministers within ruling regime have turned against Abdullah Badawi yet lack courage to oppose him. Political situation in ***Thailand*** remained critical. Amidst massive anti-regime rallies army chief suggested PM to resign he however refused to quit and assured to bring stability. Meanwhile Supreme Court has announced two years imprisonment for former Thai PM over corruption charges. ***Singaporean*** PM has urged its nation to get united in order to cope with ongoing financial crisis. ***Philippines*** still face anti-security officials' campaign by Moro rebels in South. In order to contain anti-government activities in various parts government has announced to pay 1,063 dollars for every M-16 assault rifle surrendered by a communist insurgent who abandoned the long-running rebellion.

Geo-strategic Front:

Military officials of ***Thailand*** and Cambodia held meeting in an effort to resolve growing tension. Meanwhile ***Cambodians*** have asked their government to take Thai-Cambodia border issue to the UN. Cambodia and ***Vietnam*** have signed trade agreement with China to boost its economy. Issue of settlement of Hmong refugees has emerged as irritant between ***Laos*** and Thailand. Meanwhile growing cooperation of Laos with Vietnam and Belgium appeared as significant.

Social Front:

Floods have adversely affected lives of thousands of people in ***Vietnam*** hence government has taken various measures to provide relief packages to flood victims.

Economic Front:

Indonesia has urged China, Japan and South Korea to enhance economic cooperation in order to help her meet economic crisis. Meanwhile Indonesia and ***Malaysia*** have agreed to enhance trade cooperation. Crisis of water shortage has further intensified in Malaysia however inflation has reduced at certain level. All the while price of petrol reduced by 5 cents and that of diesel rescued by 10 cents. Government of ***Singapore*** seems to be highly concerned about growing unemployment amidst ongoing economic crisis. Meanwhile Singapore's non-oil domestic exports have dropped by 5.7%. Despite the fact that ***Philippines*** has so far escaped from ongoing economic turmoil; yet economist have started giving predictions regarding decline in exports. ***Vietnam*** has announced to cut the benchmark interest rate by one percentage point to 13 per cent in a bid to free up credit for enterprises amid the global financial crisis; that aims to reduce liquidity and curb the country's double-digit inflation.

GCC:

Political Front:

GCC has started debates regarding peaceful applications of nuclear technology in this region. At ***Bahraini*** political front King urged his people to get unity at opening session of legislative assembly. In case of ***Kuwait***, PM has greatly appreciated cooperation between legislature and executive and declared this unity to be the main strength of Kuwait.

Geo-strategic Front:

At geo-strategic front growing ties between ***GCC*** and EU remained significant. Meanwhile Iranian extension of economic and defence security to GCC grabbed attention. Visit of ***Bahraini*** foreign minister to Iraq in order to boost ties, PM's appreciation of growing Bahraini ties with UK and signing of MoU between Bahrain and Iran remained the most important issues at geo-strategic front. All the while ***Kuwait*** held talks with Jordan and UAE to enhance ties. Besides that, Kuwait has recently nominated its envoy for Iraq after 18 years; being considered as the most accurate decision at current stage. Kuwait has also blamed Israel for absence of Millennium development programs in Palestine. Recent talks between Afghans and ***Saudis*** have been considered as new beginning for Afghans. ***UAE's*** growing ties with Italy, Afghanistan and the US remained in focus. Meanwhile UAE has supported international efforts to bring peace in the region. ***Qatar's*** efforts to enhance ties with Bahrain, France, South America, the US, Syria and Sudan; ***Oman's*** growing relations with Korea and boosting ties of ***Yemen*** with UAE and USA can be regarded as the other important developments at geo-strategic front.

Social Front:

While looking at ***GCC*** as a whole the most potent development at social front is keenness of Qatar regarding enhancement of cultural cooperation within all members of GCC in order to boost ties on all other fronts. Kuwait in this regard came up with a strategy based on initiative of dialogue among all states to enhance cultural cooperation. Moving towards ***Bahrain***, President of the respective country has appreciated role of scholars in boosting unity within the Kingdom. According to a report by international press freedom organization, ***Kuwait*** press has been regarded as the most free in all the 22 nations of the Arab world and also ranks ahead of the United States and Israel in conflict areas controlled by these two nations. Dutch Ambassador to ***UAE*** Gilles Plug has lauded the UAE's experience of the religious tolerance and employment of

the latest technology in serving the objectives and programmes of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Awqaf. Lastly dozens in ***Yemen*** became victim of heavy floods.

Economic Front:

Bahraini PM has assured to deal with current economic crisis at its own. ***Kuwait's*** ruler urged parliament to pass legislation to protect its oil-dependent economy from the fallout of the global financial crisis. The ***Saudi*** Council of Ministers urged state agencies to take appropriate measures to confront the negative impact of the global economic crisis.

Fertile Crescent:

Political Front:

Iraqi parliament has asked for amendments in the draft of Iraqi-US security deal. Meanwhile ***Israeli*** atrocities against ***Palestinians*** (including one case that recently took place involving deaths of 3 Palestinians while leaving few others injured) have been condemned by Palestinian government. In the meantime Israel has closed all crossing points to Gaza strip for security purposes. At ***Jordanian*** political front discussions are being made to implement decentralization plans in order to run country in a smooth manner.

Geo-strategic Front:

Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called to safeguard ***Iraq's*** sovereignty in the long-term security deal that is scheduled to take place between Iraq and the United States. Meanwhile the head of the foreign relations committee in the Iraqi Parliament expressed his country's desire for an active German presence in Iraq. UN Secretary General has asked ***Israel*** and ***Palestine*** to resolve their issue by peaceful negotiations. All the while growing ties of ***Syria*** with Turkey, Hungary, Iraq, EU and Romania remained potent at Syrian front. Democratic gathering leader MP Walid Jumblatt of ***Lebanon*** said he did not mind meeting Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah if the Shiite party's chief expressed readiness for such talks. ***Lebanese*** PM Siniora has declared solidarity with Iraq. Meanwhile he emphasized on the need to develop strong ties with Syria. All the while ***Jordan*** and South Korea have started negotiations to sign nuclear agreement based on peaceful nuclear cooperation. Likewise growing Jordanian ties with the US, Chile, Argentina, Denmark, Russia, Iran and Qatar also grabbed attention.

Social Front:

Government of ***Iraq*** has so far failed to end anti-Christian campaign in Mosul. All the while extreme Jewish groups in ***Israel*** attacked Al-Aqsa Mosque pathway in East Jerusalem backed up by the Israeli police. These attacks generated bitter resentment in the public, especially since attempts to enter Al-Aqsa are frequent and repeated particularly during the current Jewish holidays.

Economic Front:

In the words of a Kurdish leader, 'the semi-independent Kurdish region in northern ***Iraq*** has the ability to export 100,000 barrels of oil a day that may earn them up to $8 million a day. Meanwhile the investment authority in Wassit province has signed a contract with an Iraqi investor to establish an up-to-the-minute theme park worth $7 million. At ***Syrian*** economic front; the State Planning Commission discussed the expected effects of the current global financial crisis on Syrian economy. He pointed out that the crisis will have weak effects on financial, monetary and banking sectors in Syria for many reasons, including the lack of a stock market and the limited connection between Syria's monetary economy and global economy. Stakeholders in ***Jordan*** have started considering innovation to be the only way to cope with current economic turmoil.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Fertile Crescent

Aisha Rehman

From 18th to 24th October, 2008

Iraq

Political issues

- Partnership deal between industry, electricity ministries

Geo strategic issues

- Iran says Iraq's sovereignty must be respected
- National security advisor meets Kuwaiti delegation
- British defense minister in Basra
- 7 security pact paras need amendment – SIIC official
- MP urges active German presence in Iraq

Economic issues

- Deputy PM, U.S. envoy probe political, economic issues
- Kurds say they can export 100,000 barrels of oil a day
- $7M contract concluded to set up theme part in Kut

Social issues

- Government fails to halt anti-Christian campaign in Mosul
- Iraqi cabinet seeks alterations to security deal
- PM al-Maliki orders broader Christian participation in Security forces-statement

Israel and Palestine

Political issues

- Presidency & Government Condemns Israeli Escalation against Palestinians

Geo strategic issues

- Ki-moon Urges Israel and Palestinians to Forge ahead towards Peaceful Settlement
- Closing all crossing points of Gaza Strip
- MOH Meets WFP Official

Economic issues

- PM Fayyad Signs Grant Agreement with the Italian Government

Social issues

- IOF Arrests Number of Citizens in West Bank
- Extreme Jewish Groups Continually enter Al-Aqsa Mosque Esplanade
- Three Agressions in 24 Hours: Colonizers Attack Azmut Olive Harvesters
- Shufa Village Plunged into Darkness for Seventh Day
- PJS Condemns Jewish Colonizers' Attack on Journalists
- "Peace for Children of Palestine" to Spend $500,000 in Health Services
- PCHR: IOF Killed 2 Palestinians, Wounded 13 and Arrested 29 Last Week
- Colonizers Attack Palestinian Olive Harvesters in West Bank

Syria

Political issues

Geo strategic issues

- Turkish delegation visits al-Qunaitera liberated city
- Israeli warplanes violate Lebanese airspace
- The Hungarian Ambassador Described Relations With Syria as Very Cordial
- Ottri, Iraqi Transport Minister Discuss Bilateral Cooperation
- President al-Assad Receives EU High Representative of Foreign and Security Policy Solana
- President al-Assad Meets Artist Julia Boutros, Affirms Importance of Art Committed to National Causes
- Romanian President hails Syria's pivotal role in the ME

Economic front

- State Planning Commission Discusses Effects of Global Financial Crisis on Syrian Economy

Lebanon

Geo strategic issues

- UN to request transfer of 4 Lebanese generals to Holland
- Jumblattt: Yes to meeting Nasrallah, No to apologies to Syria

Political front

- PM Siniora declares Lebanon's solidarity with Iraq Christians
- Siniora: Majority must rule & the minority to be the opposition

Jordan

Geo strategic front

- Environmental cooperation
- Jordan, S. Korea to initial nuclear deal
- FDA to open offices in Jordan next year
- US agency to assist in development of environment, water sectors
- Proposed training centre to guide, strengthen regional countries' responses towards domestic abuse
- Stakeholders call for regional cooperation to protect victims of domestic abuse
- Jordan, Chile set to expand ties
- 'Jordanian-Danish ties could be much closer'
- Jordan, Argentina discuss FTA
- Russia, Iran and Qatar discuss gas cartel

Political front

- Cabinet, regions panel brainstorm about decentralization plan
- National Current bloc dominates permanent committee executive posts
- Social issues
- Queen commends Chile's commitment to early childhood development programmes
- Prince Hassan receives Augsburg Peace Prize
- Japanese, Jordanian women explore common challenges

Economic issues

- Refinery struggles to meet soaring demand on fuel after prices lowered

- Stakeholders focus on importance of innovation during current economic crisis

Iraq

Political issues

Partnership deal between industry, electricity ministries

The Iraqi Ministry of Electricity will have a partnership deal with the Ministry of Industry, under which the first will purchase all of the second's production of transformers and electrical appliances. "Today, Minister of Electricity Kareem Waheed and a visiting delegation from the Ministry of Industry, headed by the general director of the State Company for Engineering Equipment, Taha Hussein, and several other directors, agreed to buy the Industry Ministry's production of spare parts and solar electricity generating units," a spokesperson for the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity, Aziz Sultan, told.

Geo strategic issues

Iran says Iraq's sovereignty must be respected

A spokesperson for the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called to safeguard Iraq's sovereignty in the long-term security deal that is scheduled to take place between Iraq and the United States. "The stance of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Iraqi security agreement is based on respect for its national sovereignty, independence and freedom," the Iranian news agency quoted. The U.S. and Iraqi governments are currently negotiating a security pact that would regulate the presence of foreign troops in the country after 2008.

National security advisor meets Kuwaiti delegation

National Security Advisor Muwaffaq al-Rubaie discussed with a visiting Kuwaiti media delegation the recent developments in Iraq and the region. "Iraq is keen to develop good-neighboring relations," read a release issued by the Iraqi cabinet's National Media Center. "Iraq seeks to establish a regional security system with the ***aim of achieving cooperation in the fields of combating terrorism, security and intelligence coordination," according to the release.*** The delegation met with Iraqi President Jalal al-Talabani and his deputy, Tareq al-Hashemi, in two separate meetings.

British defense minister in Basra

British Defense Secretary John Hutton arrived in the southern Iraq port city of Basra to visit his country's forces there, an official source within the Multi-National Force (MNF)

in southern Iraq said. “The visit is part of the British defense secretary’s schedule,” the source said, not revealing more details.

7 security pact paras need amendment – SIIC official

Seven paragraphs in the security deal planned to be signed with Washington need to be amended, a key member of Shiite leader Abdelaziz al-Hakim’s Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) said. “There is no attitude taken in advance regarding the Iraq-U.S. long-term security pact but there are some paragraphs that have to do with Iraq’s full sovereignty and security that need to be amended,” Sheikh Jalal al-Din al-Saghir, the leader of the SIIC parliamentary bloc, told. The Iraqi and U.S. sides have been negotiating over a long-term security agreement to organize the presence of the U.S. army on Iraqi territories as its international mandate is due to expire late this year. “***These points have to do with the judicial jurisdiction, prisons, the nature of U.S. mail and the nature of the Iraqi government’s monitoring over it,” Saghir said.***

MP urges active German presence in Iraq

The head of the foreign relations committee in the Iraqi Parliament expressed his country’s desire for an active German presence in Iraq. “During his meeting with the German ambassador in Baghdad, Christopher Weil, Dr. Hammam Hammoudi called on ***Germany to open universities and cultural centers in Iraq,” according to a statement*** released by Hammoudi’s office. The statement highlighted the committee’s initiative to set up parliamentary friendship committees with several countries, including Germany.

Economic issues

Deputy PM, U.S. envoy probe political, economic issues

Iraqi Deputy Premier Rafie al-Issawi received U.S. ambassador in Baghdad Ryan Crocker and discussed a ***host of political, economic and service issues,*** according to a release by Issawi’s office. Meanwhile, another release read that Issawi has met with a delegation of U.S. political activists and heads of research think-tanks and senior officials of the U.S. embassy in Baghdad.

Kurds say they can export 100,000 barrels of oil a day

The semi-independent Kurdish region in northern Iraq has the ability to export 100,000 barrels of oil a day, a Kurdish leader said. “The region now has the ability to export 100,000 barrels of oil per day,” Nejervan Barzani, the region’s prime minister, said. Barzani did not say what prevented the Kurds from exporting the amount, which at current market prices may earn them up to $8 million a day. The Kurds ***have signed several oil deals with foreign firms despite harsh***

criticism from the central government in Baghdad which has vowed not to let the country's pipeline systems and export terminals to be used to ferry crude produced in their areas. Barzani made the remarks to a visiting group of German businessmen on an exploratory tour of the Kurdish region.

$7M contract concluded to set up theme part in Kut

The investment authority in Wassit province has signed a contract with an Iraqi investor to establish an up-to-the-minute theme park worth $7 million, according to the authority's head. "An agreement has been reached with Kut's municipal department to allocate 30 donums (1 donum= 2,500 square meters) along the Tigris River for the park," Sattar Jabbar told. Jabbar added that all machines will be imported from The Netherlands, Jabbar noted. The authority will provide all facilities for the investor by exempting him from customs charges and taxes, Jabbar noted. A Shiite province, Wassit, 180 km south of Baghdad, is in the east of the country. Its name comes from the Arabic word meaning "middle," as it lies along the Tigris about midway between Baghdad and Basra. Its major cities include the capital, al-Kut, and al-Hayy. Prior to 1976 it was known as Kut Province.

Social issues

Government fails to halt anti-Christian campaign in Mosul

The measures the government has taken so far have failed to put an end to the exodus of Christians from the northern city of Mosul. Thousands of Christian families have fled the city following threats from unidentified groups. So far 14 Christians have been killed in the city. Some Iraqi politicians and media have raised questions on the timing and scale of the anti-Christian campaign in a city traditionally known for its tolerance. There are no clear answers to who is behind the campaign to force the Christians to flee. Some local media reports, quoting government officials, blame Kurdish militias which control Mosul's left bank which has been emptied of its Christian population. Tens of thousands of Christians from Mosul and its suburbs demonstrated when Iraqi parliament last month removed a paragraph from the constitutional which allowed Iraqi Christians and other minorities a set of seats in provincial councils. Kurdish deputies in the parliament spearheaded the move to have the paragraph removed.

Iraqi cabinet seeks alterations to security deal

With the UN mandate governing the presence of foreign troops in Iraq approaching its end, Iraqi parliamentarians are seeking changes to the security deal that is scheduled to take place with the United States. Iraq's Cabinet asked for changes to ***a draft U.S.-Iraqi security agreement***, once more casting doubt on the document's speedy passage, less

than three months before the U.N. mandate authorizing the presence of American troops in the country is to expire," according to a report published by the newspaper. "The ***first Cabinet session to review the*** document revealed how divisive the security agreement has become. Only the country's Kurdish bloc is publicly backing the current accord, while Shiite Muslim and Sunni Arab allies of the U.S. remain wary of endorsing the draft, which had been described by Americans and Iraqis as in its final form. The Iraqi side again called for more negotiations." "The official heaped blame on Prime Minister Nouri Maliki for failing to put his weight behind the draft. The ***prime minister said a decision on the agreement*** belonged not to him but the government. Maliki told Kuwaiti journalists last week that he was not sure when the deal would go forward," it added.

PM al-Maliki orders broader Christian participation in Security forces-statement

Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki on Wednesday ordered a broader participation of Christians in security forces to secure their regions. "The government will punish all those who displaced Christians from their regions and also the factions that were behind the armed group that carried out the displacement," a government statement received by PM al-Maliki as saying during a reception with representatives of the Christian communities in Iraq .

Israel and Palestine

Political issues

Presidency & Government Condemns Israeli Escalation against Palestinians

The Presidency and the Government condemned the Israeli military escalation against citizens in the Palestinian Territory, where three Palestinians killed by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) and the Jewish colonizers. The Presidency Official Spokesperson Nabil Abu Rdaina called on the Israeli Government to stop the military escalation and to stop the colonizers aggressions against the Palestinian people.

He holds the ***Israeli government responsible for the extremist colonizers*** attempts to force-enter Al-Aqsa Mosque Esplanade in Old Jerusalem, warning of repercussions of any endeavor to harm Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Abu Rdaina said the Presidency follows up with awareness the actions in Jerusalem, while it firmly condemns the inauguration of a Jewish synagogue near Al-Aqsa Mosque Esplanade. He said that President Abbas is in contact with Islamic leaders informing them about the situation in East Jerusalem.

Geo strategic issues

Ki-moon Urges Israel and Palestinians to Forge ahead towards Peaceful Settlement

The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on both Israel and the Palestinians to push ahead with efforts towards a comprehensive settlement to their long-running conflict, in line with the peace process launched last year in the United States city of Annapolis. Mr. Ban writes in his annual report on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, which was released Friday. At their meeting in November 2007, leaders ***of the two sides agreed to launch immediately good-faith negotiations to try to conclude a peace treaty by the end of 2008 that resolves all outstanding issues.***

He notes that while the launch of the Annapolis process injected "new hope" into efforts to reach a peaceful settlement, the period covered by the report (September 2007 through August 2008) saw a worsening of the situation on the ground in both Gaza and the West Bank. This includes completing stopping Israeli settlement activity and lifting restrictions on movement and access. In addition, the Palestinian Authority needs to make further progress to impose law and order.

Mr. Ban highlights in particular the situation in Gaza, which was characterized by prolonged humanitarian crisis. The Gaza crossings remained largely closed, except for imports to meet minimal humanitarian needs. ***Mr. Ban emphasized that the UN will remain engaged at the political level, including through the efforts of the Middle East*** Quartet, which brings together the UN, European Union, Russian Federation and the United States.

Closing all crossing points of Gaza Strip

Israeli occupation authorities declared that all crossing points of Gaza Strip are closed. Israeli military sources pointed that this decision was taken for "security reasons after launching an explosive engine from Gaza". A truce between Israel and Palestinian factions was announced on 19 June 2008 under Egyptian auspices. Israel has continued, however, the siege on Gaza and closing crossing points out of Gaza.

MOH Meets WFP Official

Minster of Health (MOH), Dr. Fathy Abu Mughli briefed the Regional Director of the World Food Program (WFP) Dr. Daly Balqasmy about the health care situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the meeting which held at his office in Ramallah, Abu Maghla tackled as well the negative impacts of the Israeli restrictions on the health care services the OPT, mostly in Gaza Strip. The Minister thanked the WFP for its continuous support to the Palestinian people mostly in remote areas.

Economic issues

PM Fayyad Signs Grant Agreement with the Italian Government

Prime Minister Fayyad and Italian Consul General in Jerusalem Luciano Pezzotti signed, a €20 million Grant Agreement to provide direct support to the PNA budget through the European Union mechanism PEGASE. Dr. Fayyad pointed in a press conference held, in his office in Ramallah that this grant will ***be allocated to contribute to the social protection and development.*** He said that it is part of the €200 million pledged by the Italian Government in Palestinian Donors Conference held in Paris.

The Italian €20 million will be channeled to the component of the EU mechanism apt to reinforce the social protection system, contributing to the implementation of Ministry of Social Affairs cash assistance programs. They will contribute to the payment of allowances to beneficiaries registered under the Ministry, namely 45000 vulnerable Palestinian families without a regular source of income and completely reliant on social assistances from the PNA.

Social issues

IOF Arrests Number of Citizens in West Bank

Israeli Occupation Forces IOF arrested a number of citizens during its rampage into the West Bank cities of Jenin and Nablu security sources said. They old WAFA that in Jenin, Israeli troops, backed by military vehicles, arrested a citizen in the city same name refugee camp after storming the camp aid intensive fire shooting. They added that the citizen Mohammed Taleb 32 was arrested and led into an unknown place. In Nablus, IOF arrested a number of citizens in the city refugee camp of Asqar, witnesses said. They added that massive Israeli troops broke into the said camp, and stormed the citizens' houses, shortly before arresting a number of the citizens.

Extreme Jewish Groups Continually enter Al-Aqsa Mosque Esplanade

Extreme Jewish groups attacked Al-Aqsa Mosque esplanade in East Jerusalem backed up by the Israeli police. Israeli police force backed the Jewish group by attempting to arrest three guards from Al-Aqsa, who were trying to prevent the extreme Jews from forcefully entering Al-Aqsa, in order to perform religious rituals at the religious site. These attacks generated bitter resentment in the public, especially since attempts to enter Al-Aqsa are frequent and repeated particularly during the current Jewish holidays. Jerusalem governor, Adnan Husseini called on Jerusalemites to concentrate their presence in Al-Aqsa esplanade, to prevent such assaults. He Husseini warned that if, "extreme Jewish groups gathering in Jerusalem, close to Al-Aqsa Mosque" are not held back by the authorities, violent confrontations tend to occur, leading to a state no one wants. The Higher Islamic Commission for Jerusalem had an urgent session, a few days earlier, to discuss the ongoing aggressions that target Al-Aqsa, and held the Israeli Government responsible for armed extreme Jews entering Al-Aqsa by using force.

Three Agressions in 24 Hours: Colonizers Attack Azmut Olive Harvesters

About ten colonizers from the Alon Moreh colony attacked Palestinian olive harvesters in the West Bank village of Azmut, near Nablus, for the third time in 24 hours. Eyewitnesses said that armed extreme Jewish colonizers, wearing Kippa, attacked Palestinian olive harvesters with stones, and yelled blasphemes and racist slogans at them. Colonizers had already attacked twice several families while harvesting their olives on Saturday evening. An elderly man was wounded and taken to hospital.

In the mean time, colonizers of Mabodothan, south of the West Bank city of Jenin, assaulted a Palestinian farmer from the village of Arraba.

Shufa Village Plunged into Darkness for Seventh Day

The village of Shufa in the West Bank city of Tulkarem has been without electricity for the seventh day in a row, after the municipality generators—the only power source for the village—burnt out. ***Shufam south of Tulkarem has been denied a connection to the main electricity grid by Israeli occupation authorities since 2001 without any reasons,*** despite the presence of all necessary towers and lines. "Many times we have tried to take electricity from the Tulkarem municipality or from Israel, but Israeli authorities will not allow this," said a local resident. Until seven days ago, the village was supplied with electricity from the municipality-owned generators for six hours a day, from 6 pm to 12 am; or less, at a very high price. Now residents

have no electricity at all, and there is no knowing when there might be electricity again, as the Shufa municipality cannot afford to repair the generators.

PJS Condemns Jewish Colonizers' Attack on Journalists

Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (PJS) hardly condemned the Jewish colonizers' attacks against Palestinian journalists in the West Bank city of Hebron. In a press release, Head of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate Na'eem al-Tubasi stated that the attack on the journalists is a flagrant violation to international law. Al- Tubasi called on the International Journalists Union and the Arab Journalists Union to immediately intervene and stop the repeated Jewish colonizers' attacks on Journalists and citizens. Violent confrontations followed between pacifists and colonizers, who attacked a 60 year-old British pacifist woman. Al-Hashlamon, who works at the European Pressphoto Agency (EPA), was taken to a hospital for treatment.

''Peace for Children of Palestine'' to Spend $500,000 in Health Services

''Peace for the Children'', a charity initiative launched by Sharjah for the relief of the children of Palestine under the patronage of wife of Sharjah Ruler Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, will spend about $ 500,000 to deliver health and nutritional services to Palestinian children suffering from acute malnutrition.The ***Sharjah fund signed agreements with the London-based Medical Aid for Palestinians and ''Ard Al Insan'' Foundation in Gaza to improve the health well-being of Palestinian children under five years old through preventive and curative programmes.***The humanitarian health drive will serve 8000 children for nine months and will be carried out in partnership with the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) . The ***campaign aims at*** relieving the suffering amongst the children in Palestine who undergo through agony and hardships caused by Israeli crimes and blockade.

PCHR: IOF Killed 2 Palestinians, Wounded 13 and Arrested 29 Last Week

Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) killed 2 Palestinian citizens, wounded 13 including 2 children, conducted 15 attacks in the West Bank and arrested 29 Palestinians, in the period 9 - 15 October 2008, according to PCHR weekly report.

In the Period between 9-15 October 2008, IOF killed 2 Palestinian citizens in the West Bank. They wounded 13 Palestinians, including 2 children. 11 of them were wounded during peaceful demonstrations against the construction of the Apartheid Wall. IOF conducted 15 attacks into Palestinian communities in the West Bank and arrested 29 Palestinian citizens, including 8 children.

In the report, PCHR said that IOF have continued to impose a total siege on the Palestinian Territory and have isolated the Gaza Strip from the outside world. They positioned at various checkpoints in the West Bank, wounded 2 Palestinian citizens and arrested 3 others.

PCHR added that IOF imposed a comprehensive closure on the Palestinian Territory for the Jewish Succot. They also established a Jewish synagogue on Arab land in East Jerusalem. While continuing colonial activities in the West Bank, Jewish colonizers have continued to attacks Palestinian citizens and property.

Colonizers Attack Palestinian Olive Harvesters in West Bank

Jewish colonizers continue their attacks against Palestinian olive harvesters, during the olive harvesting season in the West Bank. Tens of Jewish Colonizers from Qadomim Colony near Qalqilia set fire in the olive groves owned by Fathi Amer, in the village of Qadoum, East of the city causing considerable losses. They also committed violent attacks against Palestinians working in their land.

Syria

Political issues

Geo strategic issues

Turkish delegation visits al-Qunaitera liberated city

A delegation of the Turkish Cement and Glass Syndicate condemned the brutal and deliberate destruction perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces prior to their withdrawal from al-Qunaitera liberated city. Members of the delegation toured the Syrian southern city, expressing regret of the brutal acts of the Israeli occupation forces and underlining their country's support to Syria in restoring its occupied lands in Golan.

Israeli warplanes violate Lebanese airspace

Israeli warplanes violated the Lebanese airspaces flying over the Lebanese southern regions. "Two Israeli aggressive warplanes yesterday violated the Lebanese airspace over Dir Mimas in South Lebanon making circular flights over different Lebanese regions, leaving afterwards over the sea opposite of al-Naqoura," a statement by the Lebanese Amy said.

The Hungarian Ambassador Described Relations With Syria as Very Cordial

Hungarian Ambassador, Peter Medgyes to Syria held a reception at his residence on the occasion of Hungary National Day. In a statement to reporters , Medgyes described Hungarian – Syrian relations as very cordial and date back to half a century .

He ***praised Syria's role in*** the region particularly with regard to the peace process stressing that peace cannot be achieved without Syria. He pointed out to the development of economic and trade relations between the two countries, indicating that the two countries are about to sign a number of agreements including avoidance of double taxation, and protection of investments.

Ottri, Iraqi Transport Minister Discuss Bilateral Cooperation

Prime Minister Mohammad Naji Ottri discussed with visiting Iraqi Minister of Transport Amer Abdul Jabbar Ismail the cooperation between the two sisterly countries, ***with both sides expressing common desire to further enhance and expand them to include new*** fields. The meeting also focused on the joint cooperation in the areas of land, railway, maritime and air transportation and activating the work of existing transport companies as well as discussing the possibility of setting up new companies to enhance social, economic and trade ties between Syria and Iraq.

President al-Assad Receives EU High Representative of Foreign and Security Policy Solana

President Bashar al-Assad received the High Representative of the European Union Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and the accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem, Minister and Presidential Political and Media Advisor Dr. Buthaina Sha'aban and Assistant Foreign Minister Abdul Fattah Ammoura. The delegation accompanying Mr. Solana consists of the European Special Representative for the Middle East peace process Marc Otte, Head of the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the Gulf Unit at the Council of the European Union Christian Jouret, the French Ambassador in Damascus Michel Duclos and Head of the European Commission's Delegation to Syria Ambassador Vassilis Bontosoglou.

President al-Assad Meets Artist Julia Boutros, Affirms Importance of Art Committed to National Causes

President Bashar al-Assad affirmed during his meeting with Lebanese artist Julia Boutros that the art which is committed to the nation's causes strengthens the sense of national and patriotic belonging in the Arab people. Talks during the meeting discussed the role of national artist in instilling the course of resistance and the noble values and heritage of the Arab people.

For her part, Julia expressed pride over meeting President al-Assad and participating in the "Damascus, Arab Capital of Culture 2008" festivities, affirming that Syria under the leadership of President al-Assad was and always will be a capital of Arab might, pride and dignity. Julia also thanked President al-Assad and the Syrian people for their support of the donations campaign she held for the benefit of the families of martyrs and victims of the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 2006. She added that a part of these donations will be assigned to families of Syrian martyrs who were killed during this aggression.

Romanian President hails Syria's pivotal role in the ME

Romanian President Traian Basescu stressed the importance of Syria's pivotal role in finding solutions to the Middle East problems and realizing of peace in the region.

In an interview with the Syrian TV President Basescu said that his country "highly appreciates the positive efforts Syria has exerted to end the Lebanese crisis and her exerted efforts in stabilizing Iraq and helping the Iraqi people". He pointed out that nobody can impose any solutions on the region by the force of weapons or military intervention, calling for finding solutions to any problem by diplomatic work and respecting the international agreements.

The Romanian guest stressed the necessity for strengthening relations between his country and Syria and ***activating the bilateral agreements that link*** the two countries. He also asserted that the Syrian-Romanian Joint Committee is scheduled to organize a meeting for the Syrian and Romanian businessmen next year, calling for direct contact between the Syrian and Romanian economic circles to get acquainted with the available economic opportunities in the two countries.

Economic front

State Planning Commission Discusses Effects of Global Financial Crisis on Syrian Economy

The State Planning Commission discussed the expected effects of the current global financial crisis on Syrian economy. Chairman of the State Planning Commission Dr. Taisir al-Raddawi stressed the importance of following up on the developments and effects of the global financial crisis and working to reduce its effect on Syrian economy.

He pointed out that the crisis will have weak effects on financial, monetary and banking sectors in Syria for many reasons, including the lack of a stock market and the limited connection between Syria's monetary economy and global economy. Al-Raddawi gave an analysis of the causes and future effects of the global financial crisis, pointing out to the possibility of internal inflation and stressing the importance of coordination and cooperation. He also stressed the importance of following up on the social effects of the crisis, concluding by affirming the need for taking time to figure out the basic effects of the crisis and their repercussions on countries.

Lebanon

Geo strategic issues

UN to request transfer of 4 Lebanese generals to Holland

Chief U.N. investigator Daniel Bellemare has reportedly prepared an official request for the transfer to Holland of the four Lebanese generals accused of involvement in the assassination of former Premier Rafik Hariri. The daily ad-Diyar, which carried the report, said Bellemare's request calls for providing an international jet between Dec. 5-20 under the protection of both police and Lebanese army troops. According to ad-Diyar Bellemare is to present his request to Prosecutor General Saeed Mirza. This request is to be later approved by the Minister of Justice Ibrahim Najjar and the Lebanese Cabinet. The paper stated that the process is already underway. A special Lebanese army unit assigned to protect the international investigative commission has received instructions to prepare securing the transfer of three containers of documents to a court in The Hague, Netherlands.

Jumblattt: Yes to meeting Nasrallah, No to apologies to Syria

Democratic gathering leader MP Walid Jumblattt said he did not mind meeting Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah if the Shiite party's chief expressed readiness for such talks. "I am waiting for the meeting between Sheikh Saad Hariri and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. After that, If the party saw that a meeting with me is useful, then I wouldn't mind," Jumblatt told As Safir daily in an interview. The leader of the Progressive Socialist Party denied that he would soon hold talks with Head of the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc MP Mohammed Raad at Minister Talal Arslan's residence. "We don't want to discuss issues that we would later talk about at the national dialogue table," Jumblatt said. ***He said he was ready for dialogue with Iran if the Islamic Republic took the initiative.*** But the agenda according to Jumblatt should include "the truce with Israel, implementation of the Taef Accord, the defense strategy, the excellent relations with Syria and if they (Iranians) wished to provide aid then this should take place only through the Lebanese state." ***Jumblatt, however, refused to apologize to the Assad regime.*** "I know the Syrian regime very well since the days of (former President) Hafez Assad...They want me to apologize and this is out of the question," Jumblatt told As Safir. But he ***vowed not to***

interfere in Syria's internal affairs, saying: "Let the Syrian people decide the type of leadership that suits them." When asked if he made a mistake when he called for toppling the Syrian regime, Jumblatt said: "I wasn't mistaken and I am not regretful. But the international community preferred this regime" because it doesn't want chaos in Syria. "***When the Syrian army went out of Lebanon,*** it wasn't the Americans or the French who took it out. It was the Lebanese people through the big March 14 demonstration," Jumblatt told. About the upcoming parliamentary elections, Jumblatt said that all March 14 forces should enter into an alliance away from party politics. He told As Safir that he would deal with the opposition based on dialogue and participation if the March 14 coalition wins the elections. Asked if the alliance would grant the opposition again veto power in the new cabinet, Jumblatt said: "In a democratic system, there is nothing called one-third (veto power). Sensitive and strategic issues such as Hezbollah's weapons" should be dealt with through dialogue even if there was no Hezbollah minister in the government.

Political front

PM Siniora declares Lebanon's solidarity with Iraq Christians

Lebanon's Premier Fouad Siniora declared Lebanon's solidarity with Iraq's Christians and urged their speedy return to their homes. "The Lebanese people back all efforts exerted by the Iraqi government to safeguard the social fabric of the state of Iraq," a statement released to local media reported Siniora as saying to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in a phone conversation. In recent weeks hundreds of Iraqi Christians have fled their homes in and around the northern-Iraqi city of Mosul. Christians have been targeted both Shi'a and Sunni Muslim militias, and also by criminal gangs. ***Lebanon has a growing Iraqi refugee population, currently numbering between 20,000 and 40,000,*** according to the UN. An estimated 2 million Iraqis who have fled the violence in their country.

Siniora: Majority must rule & the minority to be the opposition

Premier Fouad Siniora warned against rearming Hezbollah, saying it would not help in "settling problems, or even establishing control over Lebanon." "This is what Hezbollah would notice," Siniora told ***Siniora declared support for "excellent relations with Syria"*** and said Lebanon is ready for "security cooperation with Syria as two adult brothers, based on respect for Lebanon's independence and sovereignty." Siniora said whoever wins the 2009 parliamentary elections "should rule the country.""The majority should rule and the minority should be the opposition … this is democracy," Siniora concluded. Siniora was referring to Hezbollah -led opposition violence that lasted for 2 years in order to win a veto power in the government . Hezbollah's objectives were achieved at the Doha meeting last summer

Jordan

Geo strategic front

Environmental cooperation

US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson visits the Ajloun Nature Reserve; Environment Minister Khalid Irani signed an agreement with Johnson to ***boost environmental cooperation between the two sides***, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported. The agreement stipulates the development of environmental legislation in the Kingdom and assisting the environment education fund. Earlier, Johnson visited the Environment Ministry, where Irani briefed him on the ministry's achievements and obstacles facing the Kingdom, mainly water and energy shortages.

Jordan, S. Korea to initial nuclear deal

Jordan and South Korea will today finalize a draft agreement on nuclear cooperation for peaceful purposes. The official signing of the deal is due to take place later this year, the Korean embassy. Chairman of the Jordan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) Khalid Touqan and Korean Ambassador to Jordan Bongkil Shin will initial the draft agreement on behalf of their countries.

The deal, the embassy statement said, ***aims at enhancing*** cooperation between the two countries in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, including nuclear technology transfer. Both sides have agreed to cooperate in several areas such as technical assistance, site selection, design, construction and nuclear safety, among others, the embassy said in the statement. Moreover, a memorandum of understanding between the Korean Electric Power Corporation and JAEC will be signed in December, said the embassy, adding the deal is expected to pave way for future cooperation in the field of development, construction, operation and maintenance of nuclear power plants. In order to ease the conventional energy bill burden, Jordan has signed several deals with international parties to build its nuclear energy programme for peaceful purposes. Those included agreements with the US, the UK, Russia, Romania, the Czech Republic and China.

FDA to open offices in Jordan next year

The US will continue to support and cooperate with Jordan in the health sector with emphasis on health studies, cancer medication, health education and the provision of training for workers in the field, visiting US Secretary of Health Michael Leavitt said. "The US is providing the health sector in Jordan with $20-25 million annually through USAID" as a contribution to the most pressing needs of the sector in the Kingdom, Leavitt told a press conference. As part of this cooperation, the secretary will sign a letter of intent with the King Hussein Cancer and Biotechnology Centre (KHCBC) during his two-day visit, he said. He said the US Health Department is currently helping the centre, in cooperation with the Health Ministry, to draw up

a national plan to fight cancer, taking into consideration “the sensitivity of the disease”, through what is called “personalised medication”.

US agency to assist in development of environment, water sectors

The US Environment Protection Agency (EPA) will assist the Kingdom in developing the environment and water sectors, under a statement of intent on environmental governance Jordan and the United States signed this week. ***The agreement aims at promoting the development of strong environmental laws*** and policies, and their enforcement for purposes of fostering sustainable development and capacity building in the Kingdom’s management of water and other natural resources. "The agreement will help take the environmental laws enforcement level another step forward to support rangers and capacity building,” Irani said during the signing ceremony.

Underscoring the role of the agreement in developing the country’s environmental conditions, Johnson said the statement signifies future commitment and partnership to address environmental challenges in Jordan, in the US and globally. Johnson said they also discussed the water sector, noting that water quality and quantity is “a challenge here and it is a challenge in the United States and other parts of the world”.

Proposed training centre to guide, strengthen regional countries’ responses towards domestic abuse

The Kingdom plans to establish a regional training centre that would guide and strengthen other countries responses towards domestic abuse, a senior Family Protection Department (FPD) official said. Colonel Mohammad Zu'bi, head of the FPD, told participants at the second regional conference on family protection from violence that the centre, to be launched next year, would be based on Jordan's own 10-year experience in dealing with the problem. "However, it has been 10 years and the growth of the department's experience and expertise, together with the support of other partner agencies, helped us overcome many challenges and we believe we can help others on that track," he added. FPD officials explained how the agency works closely with a range of governmental and nongovernmental partners to ensure that child and domestic abuse cases are handled appropriately, privately and with the least amount of stress to the victims.

Stakeholders call for regional cooperation to protect victims of domestic abuse

Family protection and police authorities said the kingdom must continue to strengthen regional cooperation, along with its institutional capacity and outreach to protect victims of domestic

abuse. Opening the ***second Regional conference on family protection*** from violence, senior officials from the Public Security Department (PSD) noted that just like other communities facing the challenges of domestic violence, Jordan has its own. The FPD official urged representatives of police authorities and specialists from 28 countries in the region to join forces to address the global plight. ***Meeting brought together local and regional specialists*** dealing with family protection from both governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Egypt, Italy, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Sudan, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Mauritania, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Jordan, who shared their countries' experiences. The gathering is a follow-up to the first regional conference on family protection held in Jordan last year, where police and experts shared their knowledge on the subject as well as experiences in preventive care and treatment of victims.

Jordan, Chile set to expand ties

Their Majesties King Abdullah and Queen Rania arrived in the Chilean capital of Santiago on the first leg of a Latin American tour that also includes Argentina and Brazil. During the four-day visit to Chile, King Abdullah is scheduled to meet with Chilean President Michelle Bachelet to discuss ways of expanding the scope of cooperation between the two countries, especially in economic fields. The two leaders will also ***discuss political developments at the regional*** and international levels and prospects of Chile's contribution to peace efforts in the Middle East. The Monarch will also meet with several political and business figures, eyeing stronger bilateral ties between the two sides. In the presence of King Abdullah, the two countries will sign ***three memoranda of understanding in the fields of tourism promotion, investment*** promotion and public works. They will also renew a programme for scientific and cultural cooperation. Private sector institutions in both countries will also sign several deals. Trade volume between the two countries, which celebrated the golden jubilee on the establishment of the diplomatic ties four years ago, stands at less than $5 million as Jordanian imports from Chile stood at $4.71 million, while its exports to the Latin American country is worth $0.13 million. Jordan mainly imports grains, fruits, seeds, beverage, drugs and pharmaceuticals, while it exports plastic furniture, textiles and domestic appliances.

'Jordanian-Danish ties could be much closer'

Denmark is committed to further enhancing ties with Jordan in various sectors and supporting programmes and projects that directly relate to people in the Kingdom, "Jordanian-Danish ties could be much closer. We probably do not know enough about each other. We have many things in common. We have almost the same number of population. We have no raw materials except brainpower. We have to live from the skills of our people. So I think we share a lot of experiences and can bolster cooperation," the Danish envoy told. The annual average of Danish exports to Jordan stands at about $50 million, while imports amount to around $2 million. The ***Kingdom mainly imports pharmaceuticals, dairy products, juices, machinery and steel from Denmark, while it exports pharmaceuticals, vegetables and nuts to the Scandinavian country.*** During the

interview, the diplomat also noted that Denmark has been involved in supporting projects in Jordan in areas related to good governance, directly addressing issues related to people such as family protection and preventing violence against women and children. Denmark also assisted Jordan in drawing up the law on the Ombudsman Bureau, an independent organisation established in April to review complaints lodged against any decision or procedure by official institutions, through extending and exchanging expertise. ***He added that his country is now moving towards supporting programmes related to schools and universities, and decentralisation of government and municipalities.***

About the boycott of Danish products following the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad in Danish newspapers he said: "The whole thing [cartoons] shows that we need to understand each other better. We need to understand the sensitivities of both our countries. We need to work on that." The boycott actually hurt some Jordanians, mostly importers of dairy products, the ambassador said, adding that there was no significant impact on other items. "When I look at the trade figures, in 2008 we will probably be above what we exported in 2007. It seems so looking from the numbers we have so far… on the economic side, the boycott did not have any significant impact," he said.

Jordan, Argentina discuss FTA

His Majesty King Abdullah and Argentinean President Cristina Kirchner ***discussed prospects for a free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries.*** They said that Jordan's framework deal with MERCOSUR, a regional trade agreement ***between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, paves way for the FTA with Argentina.*** During talks in Buenos Aires, His Majesty underlined a genuine opportunity for both countries to increase trade volume and investment cooperation in vital sectors such as mining, pharmaceuticals and food industries. In the presence of the King and Kirchner, officials from the two sides signed agreements designed to boost cooperation in ***the fields of technology, trade and economy, culture and agriculture. The trade balance between the two countries is totally in favour of Argentina,*** which exported last year goods worth $67 million, while its imports from the Kingdom stood at $1 million. The trade volume declined in the first seven months of this year to stand at less than $30 million, including $29 million of Jordanian imports from Argentina.

The King briefed the Argentinean president on efforts under way to reach a peaceful comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict, which ensures the Palestinians' right to an independent state, in accordance with the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and international resolutions.

Russia, Iran and Qatar discuss gas cartel

Russia, Iran and Qatar made the first serious moves towards forming an ***OPEC-style cartel on natural gas, as the United States and Europe*** watched nervously. Such a cartel could boost Moscow's hold over energy markets at a time when Western critics fear both it and Iran view energy as a potential weapon.

For its part, Iran, in its standoff with world powers over its nuclear programme, has threatened to choke off oil shipments through the Persian Gulf if it is attacked.

A gas cartel to determine supply and influence prices could extend both countries' reach in energy and politics, particularly if oil prices bounce back to the highs seen earlier this year - prompting politicians, businesses and consumers to look towards cleaner burning natural gas and other alternative fuels. The three countries will "seriously pursue the formation of an organisation of gas-exporting countries," ***Two more meetings, in Qatar's capital and in Moscow, are needed to reach a final deal,*** said his Qatari counterpart, Abdullah Ben Hamad Al Attiya, according to the Iranian oil ministry's. However, no timeframe was given. The European Union's executive office, the ***European Commission, said that it would oppose the creation of a cartel.*** "Experts say a natural gas cartel that resembles the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries group would not have the same influence on prices as OPEC has on oil.

Liquefied natural gas - a rapidly growing segment of the market - could be traded as a commodity similar to oil at some point in the future, and the move by Russia, Iran and Qatar for closer cooperation appears to anticipate that, said Konstantin Batunin, an analyst with Moscow's Alfa Bank.

Political front

Cabinet, regions panel brainstorm about decentralization plan

The Cabinet discussed with the head and members of the Royal Regions Commission their ideas and suggestions regarding transformation into local governance. The panel, chaired by Senate President Zeid Rifai, is tasked to look into ways to implement a vision by His Majesty King Abdullah to decentralize administration and authorize residents in the Kingdom's districts to handle decision making related to the development of their regions.

In his Speech from the Throne at the opening of Parliament's second ordinary session on October 5, His Majesty said: "Participation in decision making and implementation, especially in the governorates, requires envisioning a local administrative system that tends to be decentralized and that guarantees quick and efficient implementation". "Within that context," he added, "we formed a specialized Royal commission to lay down the best concept for local government administration in the Kingdom's regions on the basis of these regions' needs and priorities. It is important to emphasize that reactivating local government administration is the best means to expand the basis of public participation and to foster political, economic and

social development." He urged the government and the Parliament to cooperate to "restudy the recommendations of the Regions Commission and draft legislation, based on those recommendations that aim at empowering local communities to define their developmental needs and programmes and follow up on their implementation". In second day session, chaired by Prime Minister Nader Dahabi, ministers and the committee members discussed the commission's ideas and proposals, and prospects of legislative changes needed to implement them.

National Current bloc dominates permanent committee executive posts

Members of the 14 Lower House permanent committees elected members of the executive offices, with the National Current bloc dominating most panels. Each committee elected its president and rapporteur during the closed-door polls at the Parliament. MPs from the 55-member National Current bloc won the presidency of 10 committees, while 11 were elected as rapporteurs. MP Mefleh Rheimi will head the Financial Committee, with Deputy Yousef Qarneh serving as the panel's rapporteur, while MP Mahmoud Mheidat was elected as president of the Arab and International Affairs Committee and Deputy Bassam Manasir as its rapporteur.

Observers said the absence of the Islamist movement from the helm of any committee reflects their diminishing influence in the Lower House, after the Islamic Action Front won only six of the 110 Lower House seats in the 15th Parliament. The polls also revealed a power struggle within the National Current bloc following the resignation of two of its members: Yousef Bustanji and Mohammad Abu Hdeib, former spokeperson of the bloc. With the conclusion of internal elections, deputies will press ahead with discussing legislation put forward by the government. The Lower House has not been able to discuss any laws since the second ordinary session opened earlier this month. Deputies expect to have their hands full in the coming weeks with several pieces of legislation on their agenda, including the human trafficking and income tax laws as well as the draft budget for 2009.

Social issues

Queen commends Chile's commitment to early childhood development programmes

Her Majesty Queen Rania highlighted Chile's progressive early childhood programmes by visiting the Javiera Carrera Kindergarten in Santiago, an Integra Foundation-supported school that caters to the underprivileged community. Queen Rania, who is accompanying His Majesty King Abdullah on a state visit to Latin America, commended the work of the Integra Foundation, noting that their progress is a model that should be exported to other parts of the world. Established in 1990, the Integra Foundation is considered the keystone of formulating child rights into a firm and well-established service for the public. It is a nonprofit private foundation focused on assisting the educational and social development of underprivileged children aged between three months and five years. Operating under the command of Chile's president, it

caters to more than 1,000 nursery schools and playgroup centres, provides assistance to 80,000 children in situations of poverty and social vulnerability, and has more than 12,500 workers committed to the development, who operate in 95 per cent of the poorest and most isolated areas of Chile. The Javiera Carrera Kindergarten assists over 200 children from low-income families. While touring the school, Queen Rania was briefed on its programmes, including the valuable food programme that aims at ensuring normal growth for the children and protecting them from health problems such as overweight and obesity, as well as early development programmes.

Prince Hassan receives Augsburg Peace Prize

HRH Prince Hassan on Saturday received the Augsburg Peace Prize. Lord Mayor of the City of Augsburg Paul Wengert said the prize was awarded to the Prince in recognition of "his contribution to Islamic-Christian dialogue, his efforts for peace between nations and religions, his impressive words in the fight against terror of every origin and his dedication to understanding between the three monotheistic religions". Speaking at the Augsburg Peace Festival Award Ceremony, Prince Hassan noted: "Before we can undertake serious consideration of peace we must first focus on restoring international trust and confidence, which is now under great stress and is likely to deteriorate further as this financial crisis turns into a monetary crisis. The world has never faced so many problems at one time, yet I also see reason for hope because the awareness is now dawning that only global solutions will see us through this great unwinding." Prince Hassan also described how the global financial turbulence affects everyone.

Japanese, Jordanian women explore common challenges

Her Royal Highness Princess Basma commended the Japanese government's support for a cooperation programme between the two countries to strengthen women's role in society. The Princess, who attended part of a dialogue held by the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) in cooperation with the Japanese embassy and the Japan Foundation yesterday, said the meeting was an important opportunity to become exposed to the Japanese women's experience and "to learn from it and exchange experiences", the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported. Under the theme "Family Change and Women's Labour: Sharing Japanese and Middle Eastern Experiences", the intellectual dialogue between Japan and Jordan was held at the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development's head office. Participants explored the challenges that women in both countries face in today's world.

Economic issues

Refinery struggles to meet soaring demand on fuel after prices lowered

The Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company (JPRC) said that gas station fuel orders quadrupled compared to the days preceding a decision to lower the prices of derivatives. "The refinery

received 898 orders to provide gas stations with 18,392 tonnes of various fuel products JPRC CEO Ahmad Rifai said in a statement. The government lowered prices of fuel derivatives by 11 per cent for gasoline 90 and 95, and 13 per cent for diesel and kerosene, while cooking gas prices remained unchanged at JD6.5 per cylinder, a senior official announced. Under the decision, gasoline 90 and 95 are sold for 545 fils and 635 fils, down from JD0.615 and JD0.710 respectively, while both kerosene and diesel are now sold at JD0.565, down from JD0.650. Rifai added that the company's technical teams are working round-the-clock to meet the demands of the gas stations on time, adding that the orders are met on a first-come-first-serve basis.

Stakeholders focus on importance of innovation during current economic crisis

The economic crisis the world is currently facing calls for a need to revisit goals and strategies in terms of innovation, head of the European Commission to the Kingdom Ambassador Patrick Renauld said. In his address at the opening ceremony of the Third Euro-Mediterranean Symposium on Innovation and Technology Programme (MEDIBTIKAR), Renauld said it is important for states to adopt the necessary policy that enables innovation, but it is also important for the state and for companies to be part of a network that facilitates knowledge exchange, and technology management and transfer. "We shall acknowledge that companies do not innovate in isolation. It has been observed that the innovation performance of enterprises is reinforced when they form clusters and networks," he added. Renauld said the existing experiences of support for innovation like economic incubators, technology transfer and access to early stage funding have been given as a concrete illustration and perspective for new strategies which will benefit the MEDA countries. Regional cooperation tackles issues that have a transnational dimension and offers a value-added approach compared with purely national programmes, he added.

BUSINESS & POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

GULG COOPERATION COUNCIL

OCT 18th – OCT 24th

MADIHA KAUKAB

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Arab and S. American countries have rich heritage - Qatari official

Election outcome unlikely to change Qatar-US ties

Doha explores nuclear cooperation with Moscow

France says contacts ongoing on Qatari initiative for Sudan

Qatari PM in talks with Brown, Sarkozy

Defense and Strategic Desk

Qatar, Bahrain hold joint security drill

Qatar hosts course on weapons convention

Qatar, Sudan review co-operation ties in military areas

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Social Desk

Omani Committee discusses GCC Summit agenda

Qaboos issues Royal grants for crafts people

International Desk

Envoy hails Oman-Korea ties

Yemen

Social Desk

Yemen upholds death sentence on spy

Dozens reported missing in Yemen floods

International Desk

Yemen, U.S. discuss future support

Yemen, UAE agree on holding meeting of joint committee soon

UNHCR asks Yemen to explain entry ban on Ethiopians, Eritreans

MONITORING REPORT

GCC

Social Desk

GCC municipal officials to meet on Sunday

GCC senior municipality officials are to hold their 18th meeting in Doha next Sunday to prepare for the 12th meeting of GCC Municipal Affairs Ministers due to be held next Tuesday and Wednesday. During the two-day meeting, the officials will discuss a number of issues and

proposals presented by the GCC member states to refer them to the GCC Municipality Ministers' in the next meeting.

'Gulf cultural integration conducive to common cooperation'

Cultural integration among the peoples of the GCC member countries will surely boost the edge to fulfill other cooperation requirements, a Qatari official said here Monday. A common cultural policy is necessary for meeting social and economic developments worldwide, Mubarak bin Nasser of the Qatari Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage told a meeting of senior GCC cultural officials.

GCC ministers agree on strong municipal ties

A meeting of GCC ministers responsible for municipalities' affairs, which concluded in Doha yesterday, discussed topics related to strengthening municipal co-operation among member states.

New GCC cultural strategy calls for constructive dialogue with other nations

Qatari Minister of Culture Dr. Hamad Bin Abdel Aziz Al-Kawwari praised on Thursday the Kuwait-proposed cultural strategy that was approved by the GCC ministers of culture at their meeting on Wednesday. This strategy essentially stipulated that the GCC countries would be commited to stay abreast of new strides and developments on the cultural arena, but would maintain the distinguished cultures and traditions of the communities of the six member states of the council, he said.

International Desk

Relations with GCC making good progress: Javier Solana

A senior official of the European Union has expressed his belief that the union and the Gulf Cooperation Council could further boost their relations and cooperation and affirmed significance of the aspired free trade accord to serve this purpose. "I am impressed with the development and growth of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) into an even more efficient organization with closer cooperation with other parts of the world," EU Foreign Policy and Security Chief Javier Solana told KUNA Sunday as he headed to the UAE.

The EU senior official heads to the Emirates to start a five-day regional tour that also takes him to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Syria.

Iran ready to give security, economic safeguards to Gulf countries

Visiting Iranian Majlis (parliament) Speaker Ali Larijani said here Wednesday Iran was ready to provide adequate security and economic guarantees to Gulf countries. Tehran seeks to forge bonds of rapprochement and understanding with other countries, particularly Gulf ones, Larijani told a news conference at the wrapping-up of his current visit to Bahrain. He hailed his talks with Bahraini King Sheikh Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa as fruitful and favorable, covering a large scope of bilateral, regional and international issues. He denied any disagreement on a planned Iranian-Bahraini natural gas project. On the contrary, he said he was impressed by Bahraini satisfaction with the outcomes of talks in this respect. Iran is willing to hammer out bilateral or multilateral deals with Gulf nations in both security and economic domains in a bid to reassure them about Iran's regional role, he said.

Iranian ambassador to Riyadh meet GCC Secretary General

Iranian ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Dr. Mohammad Hosseini met here on Thursday with the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Abdul Rahman al-Attiya.
A statement issued by the Secretariat General of the GCC said the two men discussed the developments and international issues of common concern in addition to strengthening relations between the GCC and Iran in various fields and ways of developing them to serve the interests of both sides.

Foreign Labor

GCC panel reviews medical rules for expatriate workers

Members of a GCC committee yesterday reviewed issues related to the rules governing the medical examination of the expatriate workers in the region. The delegates to the 10th annual meeting held in Doha were also briefed about the outcomes of recent meetings on the subject held in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Qatar.

Part of the duties of the committee, launched in 1995, was to ensure that the expatriate workforce - mainly semi-skilled - being recruited from countries such as India, Bangladesh, Sri

Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines, Indonesia, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia are thoroughly screened for infectious diseases such as Aids and tuberculosis to protect their employers and the general public.

Nuclear Issues

Gulf States initiate debate on uses of nuclear technology

An international symposium on the peaceful applications of nuclear technology in GCC countries will be held at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) here Nov. 3-5. The symposium will be held under the sponsorship of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah.

Atomic energy agencies from 20 countries, including Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt and others in addition to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will participate in the three-day gathering.

“The leadership of Saudi Arabia is giving high importance to this symposium in which about 50 keynote speakers from various parts of the world will present papers and researches on the topic,” said Mohammed Subian Al-Johani, secretary of the supreme executive committee for organizing the event.

The committee is under the direct supervision of Higher Education Minister Khaled Al-Anqari and is chaired by KAU Rector Osama Al-Tayib.

Meet on peaceful applications of N-technology in GCC states

Atomic energy agencies from 20 countries will participate in a three-day international symposium on the peaceful applications of nuclear technology in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states that is to be held at King Abdul Aziz University (KAAU) here from November 3 to 5.

The symposium, the first of its kind in the region that will be held under the sponsorship of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, will include Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt and others in addition to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

GCC ministers to attend nuclear forum in Jeddah

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah, who is sponsoring the first international symposium on “Peaceful Application of Nuclear Technology in the Gulf Cooperation Council

(GCC) Countries" scheduled to begin here on Nov. 3, has given consent to invite all concerned ministers in the six GCC member states to attend the three-day event.

Mohammed Subian Al-Johani, secretary-general of the conference organizing committee, said Minister of Higher Education Khaled Al-Anqari, who is the general supervisor of the conference, will personally extend invitations to the GCC ministers of foreign affairs, economy, health, higher education and scientific research, electricity, energy, industry, agriculture, water, information and oil to attend the symposium, which will discuss ways and means of introducing nuclear technology for peaceful purposes in the region.

Bahrain

Social Desk

Fight for women's rights goes online in Bahrain

A political society and a human rights group here have joined hands to encourage people to sign an online petition calling for ratifying in full the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The National Democratic Action Society (NDAS) and the Bahrain Human Rights Society are coordinators of the first of its kind- Regional Campaign for the withdrawal of reservation and ratification of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW by Arab states. "We need to create awareness on the subject which is being clearly ignored. The civil societies are now doing the job of the government in launching a campaign to lift reservations on CEDAW," said Fareeda Ghulam, head of the women affairs section at NDAS.

Bahraini PM praises scholars' role in boosting unity

Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa affirmed yesterday that bahrain was a model for peaceful inter-cultural coexistence. Bahrain's religious scholars are a model in this regard as they stand as the leading force for the people to do well. Shaikh Khalifa affirmed his support for all efforts to promote national unity and to reject sectarianism.

During a visit to Shaikh Muraikhi's majilis, Shaikh Khalifa said he was happy to see religious scholars from both sects meeting and ignoring all sectarian trivials to solidify national unity. He

also expressed his thanks and appreciation for all scholars who acknowledged His Majesty the King, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's call to start dialogues among all Muslims on the basis of forgiveness and openness.

7,000 jobs provided to Bahrainis at NEP

A Ministry of Works official revealed that 7,000 vacant jobs were provided to Bahrainis at the National Employment Project (NEP). Assistant undersecretary for the ministry Jameel Humaidan assured: "With Bahrainisation, employers are required to employ a specific rate of Bahrainis which is considered a safety valve to protect Bahrainisation, providing suitable jobs for unemployed citizens".

Political Desk

King Hamad bin Isa Al-khalifa underlined the importance of the parliamentary experience in Bahrain

King Hamad bin Isa Al-khalifa underlined, on Sunday, importance of the parliamentary experience in Bahrain. Addressing the opening of a legislative term of the Shura Council and house of representative, King hamad said the parliament was serving the country and citizens. This parliament, he said, was the house of all people and it has a "historic mandate" to honor ambitions of the Bahraini people. Bahrain, said King Hamad, succeeded in slashing unemployment to 3.8 percent over the past three months coupled with offering training for the unemployed as a step to have jobs.

The government of Bahrain, said the Bahraini Monarch, was doubling efforts tackle inflation, increase the pay and improve the social security system. The government, he went on, would implement housing projects in the coming two years, in addition to the encouraging of foreign investments.

King urges unity as Bahrain Assembly opens

Bahrain's King inaugurated on Sunday the third session of the second legislative term with calling for unity and peaceful coexistence among people. His Majesty the King Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa told the opening ceremony that was held at the Parliament that the upper and lower houses represent the unity of the country and its people.

Economy can beat any turmoil: Bahraini PM

The achievements of Bahrain in political, economic and social fronts only represent a small fraction of the aspirations of His Majesty the King, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and the government, Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa said yesterday. “Our aspirations for the future of this country are far more extensive and comprehensive,” he said, expressing confidence that the leadership, directives and vision of His Majesty the King would lead to reaching sought-after goals.

The address of His Majesty at the opening of the third session of the second legislative term yesterday launches a new and significant phase of national action to meet the ambitions of citizens, the premier stated. The Premier commended the Royal Directives in the address, including the order of His Majesty on allocating additional credit to be attached to the budget for stepping up the pace of implementing housing projects.

International Desk

Bahrain's Foreign Minister visits Iraq

Bahrain's Foreign Minister arrived in Iraq's capital Saturday for a one-day visit aimed at developing bilateral relations between the countries. The Iraqi Foreign Ministry said Sheik Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa will hold discussions with his Iraqi counterpart, Hoshyar Zebari.

Khalifa bin Salman hails Bahraini-UK ties

Prime Minister, Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa received at Gudaibiya palace yesterday, British Ambassador to Bahrain Jamie Bowden.

They reviewed the historically deep-rooted bilateral ties and discussed how to develop them. Shaikh Khalifa hailed the progress of Bahraini-UK ties and uttered desire for further cooperation. The overall regional and international developments and issues of common concern were also reviewed. Ambassador Bowden lauded the level of bilateral relations praising Bahrain’s supportive attitudes towards the international efforts aimed at reinforcing world peace and stability.

Bahrain, Iran Parliamentary Committee sign MoU

An MoU of cooperation was signed yesterday between Bahrain-Iranian Parliamentary Committee. The Bahraini side was represented by Council member Dr Saleh Ali and Shura member Dr Ameedowir Radhiee represented Iran. Dr Saleh Ali said that the MoU is a part of further strengthening parliamentary ties between the two countries in all field.

Kuwait

Social Desk

Kuwaiti surgeon develops new method to treat cataract

A Kuwaiti eye specialist has invented a process by which cataracts can be treated with a rentiscope without going for the complex option of retina transplant.

Khaled Al Sabti, head of the retina ward in the Al Bahar Eye Centre in Kuwait, told the official Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) that his invention would spare eye cataract patients the time and money consuming process of retina transplant. He claimed that his process improved the eyesight of his patients by 40 to 60 per cent.

Kuwait reform process hailed

Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah yesterday addressed the fifth edition of the Future Forum 2008 on Kuwait's political, social and economic achievements. Kuwait has fulfilled most development goals of education, health, women's empowerment, and fight against poverty and famine, he said. The State of Kuwait is pursuing its reforms in various fields out of its belief that reforms are a sustained process that could not be determined by a schedule or forcibly imposed without taking societal circumstances into consideration, he said.

Kuwait clears Shiite MPs over Hezbollah mourning

Kuwait's criminal court acquitted two Shiite MPs and five other activists on Wednesday for holding a rally to mourn a former military chief of Lebanon's Hezbollah, their lawyer said. They had been charged with spreading false news that would undermine Kuwait's foreign position and illegally distributing leaflets, Jaleel al-Tabbakh told AFP.

Kuwait leads rankings for press freedom in Arab world

Kuwaits press is the most free in all the 22 nations of the Arab world and also ranks ahead of the United States and Israel in conflict areas controlled by these two nations, according to a report published Wednesday by international press freedom organization "Reporters without Borders."

Kuwait (61st) ranked six places ahead of Lebanon (67th), the nearest Arab nation in the index that covered 152 countries and which was led by Iceland, while Pakistan was ranked last.

Kuwait stresses its crucial partaking in Islamic conferences worldwide

Assistant Secretary General for the International Islamic Council for Da'wah and Relief (IICDR) Dr. Bader Al-Mas on Thursday stressed the importance of Kuwait's participation in every Islamic conference indicating to the large Kuwaiti delegation participating in the council constituent committee's 20th meeting. In an interview with KUNA after the conclusion of the day's talks, Al-Mas said that Kuwait was one of the founders of the IICDR, with local organizations like the Ministry of Awqaf (endowments) and Islamic Affairs, the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) and Bait Al-Zakat (house of alms) all taking part in the council's functions since it was conceived.

The current Kuwaiti delegation comprises the Undersecretary of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr. Adel Al-Falah, the Managing Director of Bait Al-Zakat Abdulqader Al-Ajeel, Head of the IICO Yousif Al-Hajji, Secretary of the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHCR) Mubarak Al-Mutawwa and Director of Foreign Relations in the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Walid Al-Ammar.

Political Desk

Kuwait PM hopes gov't, parliament show "very constructive" cooperation

His Highness the Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah hoped Sunday the executive and legislative authorities show "very constructive" cooperation for the sake of Kuwait. Sheikh Nasser, in brief remarks to reporters after a dinner banquet held by parliament speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi, said hoped the executive and legislative authorities cooperate to transform Kuwait into the "pearl of the Gulf." He expressed desire that cooperation would be the essence of relations between the government and parliament.

Economic Desk

Kuwait considers law to face meltdown

Kuwait's ruler urged parliament on Tuesday to pass legislation to protect its oil-dependent economy from the fallout of the global financial crisis, warning the country was not immune from the risks.

International Desk

Kuwaiti deputy premier arrives in UAE

Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Dr. Sheikh Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, arrived here Friday evening to participate in the 5th edition of the Future Forum (Future Forum 2008), which opens here on 19th October.

Kuwait says Israeli practices prevent Palestinians from attaining MDGs

Addressing the General Assembly's Economic Committee, Kuwaiti diplomat Yacoub Ahmed Al-Nasrallah said it was with "great concern" that his country watched closely Israel's inhuman practices against the Palestinian people.

Kuwait late Monday said the Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the Golan Heights are preventing the people there from enjoying the minimum basic living standards and attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Israeli military machine, he said, had prevented Palestinians and Arab residents of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights from enjoying the minimum basic living standards, a conduct that was tantamount to flagrant defiance of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Kuwait envoy takes up Baghdad post after 18 years

Eighteen years after executed dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the Gulf emirate's envoy presented his credentials to Iraq's new Shiite government on Wednesday, promising to "forget the past".

"The political leaders of the two countries have decided to forget the past and build good relations between them," Ali al-Momen said at a media conference with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari.

Kuwait urges donor countries to honor pledges to the poor

Reduction of poverty is not possible without the donor countries honoring their pledges to poor nations or without technical support to developing nations and helping them to establish sound management and government, Kuwait stressed Wednesday, at the UN 63rd session.

Diplomat Jarrah Al-Sabah gave Kuwait's address before the UN's economic committee and made the remark within discussion of poverty reduction and other development items on the agenda. He said there is a need for equal economic opportunities and sustainable livelihoods in developing nations in general and in the least developed nations most urgently.

Kuwaiti envoy to Iraq is "a step in the right direction" - Al-Jarallah

Kuwait's Foreign Undersecretary Khalid Al-Jarallah on Thursday described the presentation of credentials of a newly-appointed Kuwaiti Ambassador Ali Al-Mo'amen to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani as "an important step in the right direction".In a statement to reporters during a meeting with Mongolian officials to sign an agreement in the field of the environment, Al-Jarallah said that further steps were on the way to bolster relations with Iraq were on the way.

Defense and Strategic Desk

Kuwait, Jordan hold talks

Chief of Staff in the Kuwaiti Army Air Marshal Fahad Al-Ameer received yesterday, a visiting delegation from Jordan's King Abdullah II Third Armored Division, headed by Brigadier Mosleh Abdulrazzaq Al-Kadat. During the encounter at the Land Forces Command Headquarters, discussions of joint interest and means to develop these interests were held between the two army officials, mainly on the military scale.
Kuwaiti Assistant Commander of the Land Forces Brigadier Hamid Makki Al-Qallaf also attended along with other senior personnel from the Land Forces.

Saudi Arabia

Social Desk

Saudi Arabia is home to 83,000 street children

A recently published study from the research centre at King Fahd Security College in Riyadh found that the Kingdom is home to 83,000 street children with their earnings, made through a variety of criminal activities, going to their families or gang ringleaders, reports Saudi Gazette.

Plan to grow number of hospitals: Naif

Prince Naif Bin Abdul Aziz, Interior Minister, opened and laid the foundations of a number of projects at the Riyadh-based Security Forces Hospital.

Political cum Economic Desk

Confront crisis head on: King Abdullah

The Council of Ministers yesterday urged state agencies to take appropriate measures to confront the negative impact of the global economic crisis. The Cabinet, which was chaired by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah, made this comment while reviewing the aftermath of the world economic crisis. It also emphasized that the government would continue to implement development projects and augment factors that would boost the country's economic strength and growth. "Saudi Arabia will continue to make budget allocations for infrastructure projects as well as for increasing production capacity and creating a secure atmosphere for more investments in the country," it said.

'Need to accelerate Saudization process'

The Saudization process needs to be accelerated and efforts should be exerted to identify and penalize companies resorting to fake methods to escape the process, a workshop has recommended.

The workshop, part of the three-day Human Resources Forum at the Jeddah Chamber of

Commerce and Indus?try here, was attended by Minister of Labor Dr. Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, Lama Sulaiman, head of the Jeddah Council of Human Resources Development and representatives from “Tasheel” an office created to classify the companies according to the sectors and to verify validation of the license of each firm. Dr. Mufarrej Al-Haqbani, Deputy Minister of Labor, said drastic plans are in the cards for achieving the real Saudization targets according to the needs of the market.

International Desk

Saudi Arabia hosted Afghan talks

Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal yesterday confirmed that the Kingdom had hosted a meeting between the Afghan government and Taleban forces but warned that any further mediation would require a readiness by the warring Afghan factions to lay down their arms and embrace the political process.

“The Kingdom’s effort was the result of an official request by President Hamid Karzai,” Prince Saud told a news conference in Riyadh.

Afghan minister says Saudi talks a start

Afghanistan's foreign minister said on Wednesday his government was at the start of a process of talks to end violence in his country, but it would only negotiate with those who lay down arms.

Palestinians welcome Israeli interest in Saudi plan

Palestinians hope Israeli calls for the revival of a Saudi peace initiative could lead to progress on a diplomatic track that has been dormant for years, their chief negotiator with Israel said yesterday.

Israeli President Shimon Peres last month called on Saudi King Abdullah to “further” a land-for-peace proposal endorsed six years ago by the Arab League, and Defence Minister Ehud Barak said last week Israelis were reconsidering the plan.

Foreign Labor

Saudi warns expatriate against heading for Haj without permits

Expatriate workers heading for annual pilgrimage without Haj permits will be deported, according to Makkah Governor Prince Khaled Al Faisal.He said teams of security officers would be deployed in Makkah and other holy sites to look for pilgrims who do not possess Haj permits, and added that such illegal pilgrims would be slapped with deterrent fines. “They may also be subjected to other punishments, deemed essential by higher authorities, including deportation,” the Saudi Press Agency quoted the governor as saying on Friday. Prince Khaled called on Saudi sponsors and employers to instruct their workers intending to perform Haj to follow regulations and get Haj permits.

Terrorism Desk

Terror trials begin today in Riyadh

The much-awaited trial of Al-Qaeda militants, arrested for taking part in a series of terrorist operations across the Kingdom, begins today in Riyadh.

“The General Court in Riyadh has set up a 10-member bench to look into the cases of 70 terror suspects including Saudis and foreigners,” an informed source said. The militants were involved in terrorist attacks that killed 200 people as well as 70 security officers, the source said, adding that lawyers would be allowed to defend the suspects.

'All terrorists do is harm their nation and religion' - Prince Naif

Prince Naif Bin Abdul Aziz, Minister of Interior, said terrorist operations targeted the way of life and principles of the Kingdom by creating chaos; in a statement to SPA prior to the trials of suspects linked to Al-Qaeda and other deviant networks overseas. Over 30 operations were carried out inside the Kingdom which included bomb blasts, murders, and kidnappings. Several bombblasts in Riyadh were targeted at major buildings such as the Traffic Administration building, Ministry of Interior building, headquarters of the special forces and Abqaiq refinery. Several assassinations were carried out in Khobar as well.

Saudi to try almost 1,000 Qaeda suspects

Saudi Arabia said it plans to put in the dock almost 1,000 defendants in the first trials of Al-Qaeda suspects after more than five years of deadly Islamist violence.

UAE

Social Desk

Dubai to impose heavy fines for sewage dumping

Dubai is to impose severe penalties on companies dumping raw sewage illegally. The civic authorities yesterday issued a circular to all companies providing sewage pumping services, as well as owners and drivers of sewage tankers, warning them of the punitive consequences which include a fine that could exceed AED100,000. Salem bin Mesmar, assistant director general of Dubai Municipality for Health, Safety & Environment Control Sector, said the municipality will take drastic action against any practices that violate environment safety rules and regulations in Dubai.

Dutch Envoy lauds religious tolerance in UAE

Dutch Ambassador to UAE Gilles Plug has lauded the UAE's experience of the religious tolerance and employment of the latest technology in serving the objectives and programmes of the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Awqaf.

International Desk

UAE to adhere to transparent nuclear policy

The United Arab Emirates has reiterated its adherence to the principles of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and reassured the world community of its commitment to transparency and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

This was stated recently by Hani Mohamed bin Huwaidin, Member of the UAE delegation to the63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly, before the Thematic Discussion of the Disarmament and International Security Committee on the issue of nuclear weapons.In his speech, Huwaidin referred to UAE’s nuclear energy development programme for peaceful purposes which, he said, “demonstrated its adherence to the principle of transparency and sets an example to the region.” Huwaidin reiterated UAE’s appeal to make the Middle East a zone

free of weapons of mass destruction and emphasise the importance of demanding Israel to ensure its compliance to the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the NPT Review Conference 1995 and relevant UN resolutions which call for the placement of all its nuclear installations under IAEA safeguards and its unconditional accession to the NPT like all countries in the region.

UAE, Italy discussed bilateral ties and latest developments

General H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi and deputy supreme commander of the UAE Armed Forces received, 19th October, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. During the meeting, attended by Foreign Minister H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Sheikh Mohammed welcomed the Italian Minister and praised the progressive ties between the two countries. He also discussed with him ways to enhance bilateral cooperation, particularly in economic, commercial and investment fields.

UAE Supports Peace Efforts - Abdullah bin Zayed

The peace, security and development in this region greatly impacts global peace and prosperity, stated UAE Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, while addressing the Fifth Forum for the Future in Abu Dhabi on Sunday. The forum is jointly hosted by the UAE and Japan.

Shaikh Abdullah noted that concerted and intensive efforts were required to surmount the global upheavals wisely, rationally and with political foresight and will. “We affirm our determination to improve the means of cooperation, facilitate confidence building and overcome the differences through dialogue and peaceful ways in order to achieve human security, sustainable peace and comprehensive reforms,” Shaikh Abdullah said. “This event reinforces our country’s efforts to achieve an economically developed, socially tolerant and a humanitarian society,” he emphasized. The minister said that the UAE supports the efforts being made in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to enhance sustainable development, peace and stability, and to renounce violence, extremism and terror. He said: “The UAE has achieved high levels of human development, standards of living and education. Medical care and housing have been given priority, in addition to human rights, women’s empowerment and women’s participation in all sectors.”

“Addressing the forum, the Japanese State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Seiko Hashimoto, said: “We respect the initiatives to develop the MENA region. - With inputs from agencies.

US-backed reform forum meets in UAE amid doubts

A forum on reform in the Middle East convened in Abu Dhabi Sunday amid Arab doubts about the US-backed initiative but with Washington insisting it is serious about promoting democracy. The meeting was the fifth since the forum was launched by US President George W. Bush in 2004 at a time when Washington was professing high aspirations for democratic reform in the Arab world following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, which toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein.

The forum aimed to promote political, social and economic reforms in the Middle East and North Africa, with the backing of the Group of Eight leading industrial nations. Arab officials said political change must come from within the region and warned against yielding to outside pressure. "Reform in the Middle East is above all a national demand," Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahayan, foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates, told the Fifth Forum for the Future, co-chaired by his country and Japan.

UAE and Afghanistan sign extradition treaty

The United Arab Emirates and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan yesterday signed three agreements on extradition of criminals, mutual legal assistance in criminal matters and assistance on civilian matters.

UAE supports international efforts for peace in region: Mohammed

On 20th October, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi mentioned that UAE will back all international efforts seeking to reach a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East and help create an independent Palestinian state.

He made his remarks during talks on Monday with Javier Solana, Senior European Union Representative for the common foreign and security policy, who is currently visiting the UAE as part of a regional tour.

US Keen to boost relations with UAE

New US Ambassador to the UAE Richard Olson on Tuesday conveyed his government's interest in boosting relations with the UAE in various fields to His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, during a meeting at the Presidential Palace in Abu Dhabi.

Shaikh Mohammed wished him success in his mission of serving the mutual interests of the two friendly countries.

Kosovo expresses gratitude to UAE for recognizing independence

A ranking official of Kosovo has expressed gratitude to the United Arab Emirates for recognizing the country's independence.

UN aid appeal to be launched in UAE

An international appeal to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian aid will be launched in the country next month, marking the first time the major UN initiative is launched from a location other than New York or Geneva, according to a senior UN official.

The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP), a tool used by aid organisations to plan, implement and monitor their activities, will for the first time be launched in the UAE on November 24, Sarah El Khazin Bouvier, Consultant for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) for the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, said at the World Security Forum in the capital on Wednesday.

Italy backs UAE stance on islands

Speaker of Italian House of Representatives Gianfranco Fini expressed today his country's support for the UAE's stance and its towards the issue of Iran's occupation of its three islands - Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa.

Fini said during a meeting with visiting Speaker of the UAE Federal National Council (FNC) Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair that the Italian chamber appreciates the real policy adopted by the UAE on the issue. He also stressed the need for settling the issue through peaceful means.' Italy shares the UAE its concern over Iran's nuclear programme and the possibility of its use in military purposes,''he said. The UAE official told Fini that the UAE continued to maintain flourishing trade and economic relations with Iran despite its occupation of its islands and its reluctance of negotiations and referring the issue to the International Court of Justice.

Foreign Labor

UAE creates foreign worker protection office

The UAE government announced on Tuesday the creation of an agency to protect the interests of foreign labourers. Labour Minister Saqr Ghubash was quoted by the official WAM news agency as saying the agency would monitor complaints from workers about unpaid wages and regulate labour conflicts that emerge over salaries.

Qatar

International Desk

Doha meeting affirms unity of Muslim Ummah

The International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) has stressed the need for mutual respect among Muslim schools of thought. The Dublin-based IUMS was launched in July, 2004, as an independent body and a reference for all Muslims worldwide. A statement issued by a two-day conference, which concluded in Doha on Thursday, urged a halt to organised and sponsored attempts to spread the Shia or Sunni school of thoughts in countries where the other school is prevalent. The International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) has stressed the need for mutual respect among Muslim schools of thought.

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Qatar for nuclear weapons-free Middle East

Qatar has outlined its support for two United Nations draft resolutions designed to bolster regional security by making the Middle East a "nuclear weapon free zone". Mohammed Al Subaey, Second Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, endorsed two draft resolutions being debated by the UN General Assembly in New York this week. "Qatar supports all resolutions likely to support peace and international security and spare us the danger of nuclear war," Al Subaey told the UN General Assembly's first committee on Thursday. "We wish to free the international community of these destructive weapons … such technology has the capacity to send mankind back to the Stone Age."

The resolution further suggests countries "agree to place their nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards and declare their support for the establishment of the zone". A second draft resolution sponsored by Qatar and other Arab

League members highlights the "threats posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons to the security and stability of the Middle East". The document notes that Israel is the only country in the region that has not become party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and calls on non-signatories to accept the "international, legally binding commitment not to acquire nuclear weapons". The draft documents follow similar non-binding General Assembly resolutions from previous sessions, and reiterate concerns highlighted in an IAEA resolution adopted earlier this month.

"Qatar supports all of the resolutions regarding the creation of nuclear weapon free zones including that in the Middle East," Al Subaey told delegates during the three-day debate. "We support the implementation of these objectives through the adherence of Israel to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons under the decision of the review and extension conference." Members of the committee, which handles disarmament and global security, expect to see the draft resolutions adopted either by vote or consensus towards the end of the month. "Qatar also reaffirms the need to settle disputes on nuclear issues through peaceful means under the UN Charter and international law," added the diplomat. "These are principles approved by this summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council held at Doha in 2007."

Nato-Gulf ties in focus at energy security forum

The need to protect petroleum resources and shipping lines in the Gulf was highlighted at a workshop that opened in Doha yesterday.

The two-day workshop on ‘Exchange of Experience on Security Aspects of Energy Infrastructure’ began with speeches by assistant secretary general for political affairs and security policy division, Nato international staff ambassador Martin Erdmann, and executive director of Qatar International Petroleum Nasser Khalil al-Jaida.

Hamad Bin Jassem, Syrian FM holds talks

Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H.E. Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabor Al Thani received here on Sunday Evening Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al Muallem . They reviewed relations between the two countries and the latest developments in the region. The meeting was attended by H.E. Dr. Khalid Bin Mohamed Al Attiyah, the Minister of State for International Cooperation , H.E. Abdullah Bin Eid As-Sulaiti , the Acting Director of H.E. the Prime Minister's office , Ambassador Yusuf Eissa Al Jaber , the Director of the GCC Affairs Department at the Foreign Miniustry and the Syrian Ambassador to Qatar H.E. Deib Abu Lateef.

Arab and S. American countries have rich heritage - Qatari official

Qatari Assistant Foreign Minister Saif Al-Buainain on Monday reaffirmed that Arab and South American countries have a rich heritage that greatly contributed to the history of human civilization. Al-Buainain, in an opening speech of the fifth meeting for senior officials from Arab and South American foreign ministries, said that both sides were keen on supporting joint cooperation that would benefit mutual interests.

The three-day meeting is being held in the framework of preparations for the second Arab-South American countries summit scheduled for late March 2009 in Doha, Qatar.

Election outcome unlikely to change Qatar-US ties

Regardless of the outcome of the November 4 presidential elections in the US, America's relationship with Qatar is unlikely to change. William Cohen, former US Defence Secretary, said yesterday: "Combat air operations and the Central Command are here which are important to the security of the whole Gulf region." Cohen was in Doha in his capacity of Senior Advisor to international law firm DLA Piper, which has announced the opening of offices here. Earlier in the day, Cohen had lunch with the Emir, H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, and Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani, where the US elections came up for informal discussion.

Doha explores nuclear cooperation with Moscow

A high-level team from Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa), headed by Vice Chairperson Issa Shaheen Al Ghanim, discussed potential cooperation between Russia and Qatar during a discussion with Russian Federal Agency for Nuclear Energy (Rosatom) held recently in Russia.

"The Russian visit was meant to discuss potential cooperation between Russia and Qatar in the peaceful use of atomic energy and ways to make use of that country's experience", Kahramaa said in an official press note yesterday.

France says contacts ongoing on Qatari initiative for Sudan

France said on Wednesday that it was still maintaining contacts with Qatar over that countrys attempt to mediate a solution with Sudan over the Darfur crisis.

"We are in close contact with Qatar. A French mission went there in mid-September and Issa Maraut, the special envoy for Darfur appointed by (Foreign Minister) Bernard Kouchner, is

currently in Doha," Foreign Ministry spokesman Eric Chevalier said in answer to a KUNA question.

Qatari PM in talks with Brown, Sarkozy

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown met Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani at 10 Downing Street yesterday.

Talks during the meeting dealt with bilateral ties and ways of enhancing them in all spheres as well as issues of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Director of HH the Emir's office HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Acting Director of the Premier and Foreign Minister's office Abdullah bin Eid al-Sulaiti, Qatar's Ambassador to Britain Khalid bin Rashid al-Mansouri and member of the Qatar Investment Authority's executive board Hussein al-Abdullah.

Defense and Strategic Desk

Qatar, Bahrain hold joint security drill

Qatar and Bahrain hold joint security drill on 20th of October. The joint mock drill aims at measuring the level of preparedness as well as gauging the range of co-operation and collaboration between security agencies that are members of the Permanent Committee for Emergency," an official at the Ministry of Interior said yesterday.

Qatar hosts course on weapons convention

Qatar is hosting a five-day basic course for personnel of National Authorities in Asia involved in the national implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), here from October 19 to 23.

The function is organised by Qatari Armed Force in collaboration with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The training course aims to assist States Parties in the region to effectively comply with their obligations under the Convention, and is designed to increase national capacities for fulfilling the objectives set out in the Article VII action plan.

The training will help member countries in drafting and enacting national implementing legislation, declarations and verification provisions of the CWC, classification of chemical weapons, among other topics.

Qatar, Sudan review co-operation ties in military areas

Qatar Armed Forces Chief of Staff H.E. Maj. Gen. Hamad bin Ali Al-Attiyah met on Sunday with Chief of Staff of the Sudanese Armed Forces Lt.General Mohammed Abdelgader Nassr al Din, who is currently visiting Qatar. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of cooperation between the two countries and ways of developing and strengthening them, especially in military areas.

Oman

Social Desk

Omani Committee discusses GCC Summit agenda

The High Committee for Conferences, Oman, held a meeting at the Council of Ministers, on 18th October, under the chairmanship of His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers and Chairman of the Committee.

The committee discussed the latest international developments in the wake of the global financial crisis and its implications to economies. It also reviewed results of a delay in some co-operation aspects and their impacts on the joint GCC action. It also discussed enforced integrated developmental issues within the context of the GCC's long-term comprehensive development strategy 2000-2025 aimed to speed up the block's economic integration progress.

Qaboos issues Royal grants for crafts people

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has issued two Royal grants in favor of citizens operating in craft industries. The first grant came in support of craft industries and crafts people, providing them with necessary equipment, maintenance of crafts sites and covering the cost of research. The second grant provides for the setting up of three centres for crafts production and training in the governorates of Musandam and Al Buraimi and the Al Dhahirah region. Shaikha Aisha bint Khalfan al Siyabiyah, Chairperson of the Public Authority for Craft Industries (Paci), said that His Majesty the Sultan's directives are aimed to promote the crafts sector in the Sultanate.

International Desk

Envoy hails Oman-Korea ties

The Korean Embassy hosted a reception at the Grand Hyatt Muscat on Monday marking the Korean National Foundation Day. The event was attended by a number of senior government officials, diplomats, and other dignitaries and guests, Addressing the gathering, Ambassador Cho

Sung-hwan hailed the blossoming economic, political and cultural ties between Oman and Korea.

Yemen

Social Desk

Yemen upholds death sentence on spy

A Yemen court of appeal confirmed on Monday a death sentence on espionage charges against a Saudi who had been stripped of his citizenship, while it acquitted a Yemeni national. Hamad al-Dhahouk, a former Saudi soldier of Yemeni origin, and Abdul Aziz al-Hatbani, an officer in Yemen's army, were both sentenced to death in February by a court specialised in handling terrorism cases.

Dozens reported missing in Yemen floods

Dozens of people are missing after floods caused by heavy rains swept through Yemen's southeastern province of Hadramaut, which has been declared a disaster zone, local officials said on Friday. "Dozens of people have been reported missing in the floods caused by torrential rains that have lashed the region since Thursday," one official told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

International Desk

Yemen, U.S. discuss future support

Yemen and U.S have discussed the priorities of future support, particularly in fields of good governing, economy, education, agriculture, water and energy, Saba reported. Deputy Premier for Economic Affairs Abdul Karim al-Arhabi held on Thursday talks with Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Henrietta Fore over development programs implemented by USAID in the country. Al-Arhabi reviewed the development challenges Yemen faces including overpopulation, water scarcity and raising poverty average due to the international food crisis. He highlighted the government's future strategies in this regard, making clear that the sectors of higher education, technical education and health services are the government's top priorities.

The USAID's official Fore reviewed the progress of the Agency's development programs in governorate of Saada, Jawf, Marib, Shabwa and Amran, asserting the USAID keenness on continuing its support for development efforts in the country.

Yemen, UAE agree on holding meeting of joint committee soon

Minister of Foreign Affairs Abu Bakr al-Qirbi discussed on Sunday with Emirati counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan mutual relations between the two countries and means of

improving them. Al-Qirbi said that his meeting with hi UAE counterpart dealt with activating Yemeni- Emirate Joint Committee and the two parts agreed on holding the committee's meetings during the forthcoming two months.

UNHCR asks Yemen to explain entry ban on Ethiopians, Eritreans

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is seeking clarifications from Yemen over a decision to bar Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees from entering the country, a spokesman said yesterday. The UNHCR also said it was concerned about the fate of 112 Ethiopian refugees believed to have been detained in Yemen over the past two weeks. The UNHCR said the Yemeni Interior Ministry has announced that Ethiopians and Eritreans would be denied entry to the country, which still grants immediate refugee status to Somalis fleeing their war-torn homeland.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

SOUTH EAST ASIA

Tatheer Sherazi

Monitoring Report

From 17 October to 24 October

Presentation: October 29, 2008

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- Aceh Ex-Rebels' Office Hit In Grenade Attack - Official

Economic Front

- ASEAN countries reiterate commitment to food security
- SBY, business leaders want ‘emergency fund'
- Trade Minister: Indonesia, China should stabilize economy in partnership amid crisis

- Asia's poor toil on oblivious to world economic crisis
- ASEAN leaders to hold crisis meeting next week
- Indonesia lifts trading ban on minister’s firms
- Indonesia may delay first global Islamic bond

Malaysia

Political front

- Malaysia: MPs fear change of govt, charges opposition leader
- Indonesia, Malaysia to improve trade cooperation

Economic Front

- Malaysia reviewing policy on iron & steel sector
- Malaysia inflation seen easing in September
- Water shortage crisis looms over Malaysia
- Petrol prices down five cents, diesel 10 cents

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Thailand

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- Thai gov't to give 120 days to write new constitution
- Thai Supreme Court Convicts Thaksin
- Thai PM refuses to quit as thousands rally in Bangkok
- Thai gov't to give 120 days to write new constitution
- Thai army denies government rift
- Thailand, Cambodia meet on border dispute
- UN action needed for border row, groups say
- Thailand, Cambodia meet

Economic Front

- Honda opens new plant in Thailand

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- Deposed Prime Minister of Thailand guilty of corruption

Singapore

Political/Social front

- China, Singapore sign free trade agreement
- PM Lee says nations need better coordination to tide over crisis

Economic Front

- Govt expenditure to increase by 3% of GDP in five years' time
- Singapore's September non-oil domestic exports down 5.7% on-year
- S'pore govt warns of slower growth and higher unemployment ahead
- S'pore's financial system is sound, S$150b guarantee for deposits sufficient
- SMEs can improve credit profile to get funding
- Process industry in Singapore relatively sheltered from financial turmoil
- Energy companies hit by lack of liquidity and slowing demand
- ILO says ASEAN's unemployment rate could go up if crisis continues

Philippine

Political/Economic front

- Moro rebels raid south Philippine village, kill one
- Arroyo vows no let-up in army offensive
- Philippines lures rebels with cash for guns
- Catholic priest survives attack by insurgents

Economic Front

- Unscathed from the global financial crisis
- Govt to consider restarting some of deferred building projects if need arises

Enviromental Front

Vietnam

Political /Economic Front.

- Vietnam to deepen partnership with China: Vietnamese official
- Vietnam cuts prime rate amid global turmoil
- Finance Ministry to oversee foreign loans.
- Pact signed to set up economic zone in Vietnam

Social Front

- Human Rights Watch Monitoring Crackdown on Catholics
- Injured, 7 Missing In Vietnam Floods
- Vietnam boosts investment in Laos' Savannakhet

- Vietnam suffers flash floods in mountain regions.

- Vietnam cuts prime rate amid global turmoil
- Hardsaifong flood victims receive aids

Laos

Social Front

- Thailand, Laos Hmong Refugee Crisis

- Laos, Vietnam plan power line for hydro-electricity - *ADB*
- Laos and Belgium to help disabled people

Cambodia

Political /Geostretegic/Social Front

- Top commanders will hold talks Thursday in Siem Reap

- No more border clashes, Rais says

- Cambodia, Thailand start annual regional border meeting .
- Cambodia recruiting militias on border with Thailand
- Cambodia vows to improve defence

Social Front

- Refugees and asylum-seekers will now have their cases reviewed by the Department of Immigration, but the UN is not completely out of the loop

Summary

In this week south East Asia is facing the same situations at political, social, and economic level. The same region has a lot of diversity in many things but at the same time has also similarity in many things. Important thing of this region is the economy of this region that makes it valuable not only for whole of the world as a whole but also for great powers.

This region has approximately similar characteristics in its location and demography and having the areas with flooded dangers, political instability if not exactly instability then weak democratic institutions because of colonial heritage.

This week at political front state of political instability is still prevailing in Thailand that was started in July. Although now there is a newly elected government but that is also facing crisis on getting confidence because of many reasons. In Philippine civil war like situation is still going on and the victims of this conflict are facing the troubles of residence and even of eating. At social level Laos and Vietnam are facing the troubles of flood. At geo-strategic front conflict on boarder issue is still prevailing between Thailand and Cambodia. Improvement on this issue is that unlike the previous week, peace talks have been started between the both countries.Althogh Cambodia had approached to UN for resolution of this matter but at the same time both countries are refusing for any mediator. At economic level although Vietnam is emerging as a global hub but it is also in the grip of global economic crisis like the other countries of this region.

The summary of news item is as follows:

Indonesia

Political /Social Front

- **Aceh Ex-Rebels' Office Hit In Grenade Attack - Official**

A grenade exploded Thursday at the headquarters of the former Free Aceh Movement guerrilla fighters in the capital of Indonesia's restive Aceh province, an official said.

Economic Front

- **ASEAN countries reiterate commitment to food security**

A seminar on the regional food security strategy said the governments of ASEAN countries should take appropriate measures to narrow the gap between production cost and consumer price of food, and develop long-term strategies to keep food prices stable while ensuring producers' interest.

- **SBY, business leaders want 'emergency fund'**

Southeast Asian countries, together with Japan, South Korea and China, should hasten the creation of a buffer fund to help economies in the region hit hard by the global financial crisis, Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said Thursday (October 23).

- **Trade Minister: Indonesia, China should stabilize economy in partnership amid crisis**

Indonesian Trade Minister Mari Elka Pangestu said that Indonesia and China would preserve strategic cooperation partnership amid the global economic slowdown and financial crisis.

- **Asia's poor toil on oblivious to world economic crisis**

Oblivious to the global crisis, food vendors, cleaners and gardeners at the Indonesian Stock Exchange struggle to make ends meet on a few dollars a day while brokers gamble millions inside. "I have no idea about what's happening," said Firman, one of the army of cleaners who service the bustling exchange, as he swept the marble lobby and emptied standing ashtrays outside the trading floor.

- **ASEAN leaders to hold crisis meeting next week**

Southeast Asian leaders will meet in Beijing next week to discuss measures to deal with the global financial crisis, the regional bloc's top official said on Friday. The secretary-general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Surin Pitsuwan, said the summit of the 10-nation grouping will be held on Oct. 23 or Oct. 24, and may also include leaders from China, Japan and South Korea.

- **Indonesia lifts trading ban on minister's firms**

Indonesia lifted a trading ban on three firms controlled by the billionaire welfare minister Friday, an official said amid reports of a government rescue plan for his debt-ridden group.

- **Indonesia may delay first global Islamic bond**

Indonesia's first global Islamic bond is likely to be delayed because of financial market turmoil, a minister said on Friday, a further blow after the government cancelled all domestic debt auctions for the rest of this year.

Malaysia

Political front

- **Malaysia: MPs fear change of govt, charges opposition leader**

Political change in Malaysia is possible, but MPs from the ruling coalition fear government reprisals if they back the opposition, its leader, Anwar Ibrahim, told Adnkronos International (AKI).

- **Indonesia, Malaysia to improve trade cooperation**

Indonesia and Malaysia agreed at a two-day commission beginning on Tuesday to look into the definition of border trade stipulated by their border agreement signed in 1970 and revised in 2006, The Jakarta Post quoted an Indonesian official as saying.

Economic Front

- **Malaysia reviewing policy on iron & steel sector**

THE government is reviewing the current policy on the iron and steel industry in line with the objectives outlined under the Third Industrial Master Plan (IMP3), Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Jacob Dungau Sagan said.

- **Malaysia inflation seen easing in September**

Malaysian inflation is likely to ease slightly in September but hold around near-27 year highs, offering the central bank little room for any near-term interest rate cuts, a Reuters poll showed.

- **Water shortage crisis looms over Malaysia**

Many parts of Malaysia face a lack of water although the country has renewable water that is five times per head higher than that in many regions in the world.And poor water management is the culprit, said Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Douglas Unggah Embas.

- **Petrol prices down five cents, diesel 10 cents**

Pump prices are down again - the second time in just over a week. The last time fuel prices were cut was on Oct 7.

Social Front

Thailand

Political front

- **Thai gov't to give 120 days to write new constitution**

Thailand cabinet on Tuesday said that the country's new constitution drafting committee (CDA) should be given a revised timeframe of 120 days instead of the previous 240 days to amend the 2007 Constitution.

- **Thai Supreme Court Convicts Thaksin**

Thailand's Supreme Court convicted deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra of abuse of power and sentenced him to two years in prison for helping his wife secure a land deal.

- **Thai PM refuses to quit as thousands rally in Bangkok**

Thailand’s powerful army chief on Thursday had hinted that the premier should resign over the clashes, prompting rumours that Somchai may heed his advice and dissolve parliament. But despite calling an urgent meeting of his coalition partners, Somchai insisted he would stay on for the sake of the country.

- **Thai gov't to give 120 days to write new constitution**

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- **Thai army denies government rift**

The supreme commander of Thailand's armed forces has denied rifts between the military and the government, saying the two were working fine.
"We can work together," said Supreme Commander Gen Songkitti Jakkabatra at a royal ceremony in the capital Bangkok.

- **Thailand, Cambodia meet on border dispute**

Thai and Cambodian military officials met Thursday in an attempt to defuse tensions over a border dispute that briefly erupted into deadly clashes last week.The meeting between the mid-level officials in Cambodia's northwestern tourist hub Siem Reap is meant to pave the way for talks between senior military commanders on Friday.

- **UN action needed for border row, groups say**

CIVIL society groups on Monday criticized the government for not appealing to the United Nations for help in its ongoing standoff with Thailand over disputed territory along the border.

At least thee Cambodian soldiers are dead after clashes last week with Thai troops on the border near Preah Vihear temple.

- **Thailand, Cambodia meet**

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Economic Front

- **Honda opens new plant in Thailand**

Honda Motor Co said Tuesday that operations have begun to turn out the Accord sedan at its Thai unit's second plant, built next to its existing plant in Ayutthaya.

Social Front

- **Deposed Prime Minister of Thailand guilty of corruption**

A court in Thailand has found deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra guilty of corruption and sentenced him to two years imprisonment. But he is unlikely to serve any time because he is living in exile in England after escaping from Thailand when he was summonsed to court. The case is one of several corruption allegations against Thaksin.

Singapore

Political/Social front

- **China, Singapore sign free trade agreement**

China and Singapore signed a free trade agreement Thursday to bolster their economies ahead of an Asia-Europe summit focusing on the global financial crisis.

- **PM Lee says nations need better coordination to tide over crisis**

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has said countries need better coordination and mutual understanding to tide over the current financial crisis. One way, he said, is to push for linkages between Asia and the European Union, and focus on promoting free trade.

Economic Front

- **Govt expenditure to increase by 3% of GDP in five years' time**

The Singapore government expects to spend about three per cent more of its gross domestic product (GDP) annually over the next five years.

- **Singapore's September non-oil domestic exports down 5.7% on-year**

Singapore's non-oil domestic exports fell 5.7 per cent in September as compared to the same period last year, due to lower exports of both electronics and non-electronic products.

- **S'pore govt warns of slower growth and higher unemployment ahead**

Trade and Industry Minister Lim Hng Kiang has said the country is set for several quarters of slower growth. Speaking in Parliament on Monday, Mr Lim said this could stretch on for longer, depending on the state of the global economy.

- **S'pore's financial system is sound, S$150b guarantee for deposits sufficient**

The Singapore government has said its financial system is robust and it will be able to pay for all the Singapore dollar deposits it has guaranteed.

- **SMEs can improve credit profile to get funding**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are finding it harder to get funding, as banks tighten credit lines amid the spiralling financial crisis. However, one of the ways SMEs can improve their standing with lenders is by putting their credit background into a database, or credit bureau.

- **Process industry in Singapore relatively sheltered from financial turmoil**

The chemicals sector in Singapore has been buoyed by rising oil prices and demand for chemical products. As a result of this growth, companies which provide engineering and maintenance services for the chemicals industry are likely to be sheltered from the current financial turmoil.

- **Energy companies hit by lack of liquidity and slowing demand**

Energy companies are feeling the heat of the credit crunch. According to industry players, the lack of liquidity in the market is hurting demand for energy-related products. And slowing demand is expected to continue into next year.

- **ILO says ASEAN's unemployment rate could go up if crisis continues**

The International Labor Organization has warned that with economic growth hit by the financial crisis, ASEAN's unemployment rate - which had been improving - could get worse, and the more developed ASEAN countries are going to be worst hit.

Philippine

Political/Economic front

- **Moro rebels raid south Philippine village, kill one**

Muslim rebels raided a village in the southern Philippines and killed a pro-government militiaman, a

- **Arroyo vows no let-up in army offensive**

President Gloria Arroyo inspects recovered firearms from Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels during her visit to the military camp in Cotabato city, southern Philippines, yesterday

- **Philippines lures rebels with cash for guns**

The Philippine government on Sunday said it would pay 1,063 dollars for every M-16 assault rifle surrendered by a communist insurgent who abandoned the long-running rebellion.
The money would be on top of another 70,000 pesos in cash and livelihood assistance to be extended to any New People's Army (NPA) rebel turning over a new leaf, said the government's chief peace adviser Hermogenes Esperon.

- **Catholic priest survives attack by insurgents**

A Catholic priest survived an attack by suspected Al Qaeda-linked militants yesterday in the southern Philippines, but four of his security escorts were wounded, a Marine officer said.

Economic Front

- **Unscathed from the global financial crisis**

THE Philippines has so far escaped relatively unscathed from the global financial crisis, but its export industries are bracing themselves for tougher times ahead, analysts say. While orders for the remainder of the year still look healthy, exporters fear that going forward into 2009 the outlook might not be so rosy, especially if the United States slips into recession as expected.

- **Govt to consider restarting some of deferred building projects if need arises**

Domestic construction demand is expected to reach close to S$30b this year compared to S$17b in 2006.But National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan warned the industry is expected to see a slowdown with the current economic situation.

Enviromental Front

Vietnam

Political front/Economic Front.

- **Vietnam to deepen partnership with China: Vietnamese official**

Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's upcoming China visit will deepen the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation, said the neighboring country's minister to China here on Friday.

- **Vietnam cuts prime rate amid global turmoil**

Vietnam's central bank on Tuesday cut the benchmark interest rate by one percentage point to 13 per cent in a bid to free up credit for enterprises amid the global financial crisis.
The monetary loosening reverses a series of three hikes this year, from 8.25 per cent to 14 per cent, which had aimed to reduce liquidity and curb the country's double-digit inflation.

- **Finance Ministry to oversee foreign loans**

The Ministry of Finance will assume responsibility for all foreign loans taken out by provincial governments, if legislation considered by the National Assembly Wednesday is passed.

- **Pact signed to set up economic zone in Vietnam**

China and Vietnam Wednesday signed an agreement to build an economic and trade cooperation zone in Haiphong, the third largest city in the Southeast Asian country.The zone will be modeled on Shenzhen, China's first special economic zone and the leading city in its reforms.

Social Front

- **Human Rights Watch Monitoring Crackdown on Catholics**

The Vietnamese government should immediately release Roman Catholics arrested for holding peaceful prayer vigils in Hanoi and hold accountable police and others responsible for attacking Catholic parishioners, Human Rights Watch said.

- **Injured, 7 Missing In Vietnam Floods**

Four people were injured and seven were reported missing Sunday after heavy rains and flooding struck central Vietnam, officials said.

- **Vietnam boosts investment in Laos' Savannakhet**

Vietnam has been increasing its investment in the Lao central province of Savannakhet, which shares borderline with Vietnam.

- **Vietnam suffers flash floods in mountain regions**

Flash floods from heavy rains in central Vietnam this month have killed at least seven people. Government sources have said three provinces, Thua Thien Hue, Quang Nam and Quang Ngai, have been especially hard hit, with tens of thousands of homes submerged under water by the weekend.

- **Vietnam cuts prime rate amid global turmoil**

Vietnam's central bank on Tuesday cut the benchmark interest rate by one percentage point to 13 per cent in a bid to free up credit for enterprises amid the global financial crisis.

- **Hardsaifong flood victims receive aids**

The Public Health Service of Vientiane has donated relief aids worth 11 million kip to the Hardsaifong district, Vientiane; to help its flood victims. The package was handed over on Monday at the Administration Office of Hardsaifong district by the Head of Vientiane Public Health Service Dr Inlavanh Keobounphanh and the Chief of Hardsaifong district, Mr. Bounthong Phimmaseng.

Laos

Political front
Social Front

- **Thailand, Laos Hmong Refugee Crisis**

Thailand, Laos Hmong Refugee Crisis: Officials Demand Hmong Volunteer to Return to Killing Fields, Reeducation Camps

Royal Thai soldiers and Ministry of Interior officials (MOI) at Ban Huay Nam Khao, Petchabun Province, Thailand havetold Hmong refugees that if no one volunteers to return to Laos in the current month of October, then the military will again begin forcingthe Hmong political refugees back to Laos.

- **Laos, Vietnam plan power line for hydro-electricity - *ADB***

Laos and Vietnam plan to build a cross-border power transmission line so Laos can sell hydro-electricity to its energy hungry neighbour, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Friday.

- **Laos and Belgium to help disabled people**

(KPL) Lao Disabled People's Association and the International Organization for Disabled People of Belgium to Laos signed a Memorandum of Understanding on capacity building for disabled people on 10 October.

Cambodia

Political /Geostretegic/Social Front

- **Top commanders will hold talks Thursday in Siem Reap**

Mourner places incense sticks at a memorial ceremony in Phnom Penh Tuesday for the three Cambodian soldiers who died in last week's fighting on the border.

- **No more border clashes, Rais says**

Violence is unlikely to erupt again along Thailand and Cambodia's disputed border after Southeast Asian leaders appealed for peace, Malaysia said Tuesday.

- **Cambodia, Thailand start annual regional border meeting**

Officials of the regional border committees of Cambodia and Thailand on Thursday held their annual meeting to solve bilateral differences and seek for development over border issues.

- **Cambodia recruiting militias on border with Thailand**

Cambodian provincial and military officials said they are recruiting militias along the border with Thailand to protect frontier villages if hostilities erupt again amid a territory dispute between the two countries, national media reported Thursday.

- **Cambodia vows to improve defence**

Cambodia's premier vowed Friday to improve the country's defence capabilities, but insisted there would be no war with Thailand after a deadly firefight erupted on their disputed border.

Social Front

- **Refugees and asylum-seekers will now have their cases reviewed by the Department of Immigration, but the UN is not completely out of the loop**

Montagnards protest the deportation of 28 ethnic minority asylum-seekers outside the Phnom Penh UNHCR office in July. FOREIGN asylum-seekers in Cambodia will now have their cases heard at the Department of Immigration rather than the UN High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) office, according to a press release Monday.

Detailed Monitoring Report

Indonesia

Political /Social Front

- **Aceh Ex-Rebels' Office Hit In Grenade Attack - Official**

A grenade exploded Thursday at the headquarters of the former Free Aceh Movement guerrilla fighters in the capital of Indonesia's restive Aceh province, an official said.The blast smashed windows in the house occupied by the Aceh Transitional Committee, or

KPA, the body set up to represent the ex-rebels, but there were no injuries, committee spokesman Ibrahim Syamsuddin said. The KPA demanded the government set up a special police team in Aceh, which has been shaken by a spate of grenade attacks and kidnappings in recent month. Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatra, was the scene of a three-decade separatist conflict which claimed more than 15,000 lives before the guerrilla fighters signed an autonomy power-sharing deal with Jakarta in 2005.

All parties in Aceh, the only province in Indonesia which is allowed to have local political parties, complain of threats and violence as tensions mount ahead of April elections.

Economic Front

- **ASEAN countries reiterate commitment to food security**

A seminar on the regional food security strategy said the governments of ASEAN countries should take appropriate measures to narrow the gap between production cost and consumer price of food, and develop long-term strategies to keep food prices stable while ensuring producers' interest.

The seminar was held in Hanoi on Oct. 21 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the ASEAN Secretariat as past of the programme of the 30 th meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry.

The strategy and framework of action on food security in the ASEAN region for the 2009-2013 is directed toward the goal of promoting food production in the region to help farmers improve their economic conditions, so that regional countries can ensure sustainable food security and successfully cope with food crisis.

Many participants noted that in addition to their commitment to regional food security, regional countries should review their programmes on social security including food price subsidy for the poor and improve their policies regarding the production and distribution of food.

- **SBY, business leaders want ‘emergency fund'**

Southeast Asian countries, together with Japan, South Korea and China, should hasten the creation of a buffer fund to help economies in the region hit hard by the global financial crisis, Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said Thursday (October 23).

Yudhoyono said regional leaders should consider revisiting the Chiang Mai Initiative, established after the 1997 financial crisis, to put up a standby facility that will help countries fight speculative attacks on their currencies.

“It is imperative that we hasten this mechanism,” Yudhoyono said, speaking before business leaders attending the 11th Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) ahead of the 7th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) on October 24-25.“Asia must also ensure that trade and investment flows continue as the region will be an important source of growth during the expected slowdown in the global economy,” Yudhoyono said.

Yudhoyono, who met with Chinese President Hu Jintao earlier in the day, said Indonesia is willing to work with China and other countries in implementing a swap arrangement fund to enable economies in the region to help one another during the turmoil.

The financial crisis and the concerted response from Asia and Europe is on the table at the 7th ASEM meeting to be attended by leaders from 45 countries.

East Asian finance ministers have agreed previously to create an $80 billion currency swap to replace existing arrangements under the Chiang Mai Initiative.

- **Trade Minister: Indonesia, China should stabilize economy in partnership amid crisis**

Indonesian Trade Minister Mari Elka Pangestu said that Indonesia and China would preserve strategic cooperation partnership amid the global economic slowdown and financial crisis.

In an exclusive interview with Xinhua on Wednesday, the minister said that partnership will be an umbrella for the two countries to enhance the good economic cooperation and mitigate the direct impact of the global financial crisis.

There are several elements included in the agreement which was signed by the heads of two states, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Chinese President Hu Jintao in April 2005. The first one is a commitment for the two countries to increase trade which were targeted to be 30 billion U.S. dollars by the year of 2010.

She also expected China and Indonesia to conduct more trade events and commissions, such as the Indonesia Trade Expo, so as to increase trade promotions between the two sides. Investment is another significant effort for the two countries to increase the trade volume, she said.

Another part of the two countries' cooperation was in the sectors of financing and soft loans. She mentioned investment sectors which involved Chinese state-owned enterprises. The 10,000megawatt of power plant was one of the investments which was being financed by the Export and Import Bank of China.

Indonesia also hoped that cooperation of investment can be expanded through the infrastructure sector in Indonesia. Indonesia's exports to China are mainly food, fuel and products that support China's industrial growth, such as mineral, rubber and chemicals.

- **Asia's poor toil on oblivious to world economic crisis**

Oblivious to the global crisis, food vendors, cleaners and gardeners at the Indonesian Stock Exchange struggle to make ends meet on a few dollars a day while brokers gamble millions inside. "I have no idea about what's happening," said Firman, one of the army of cleaners who service the bustling exchange, as he swept the marble lobby and emptied standing ashtrays outside the trading floor.

Indonesia's stock market has shed 12.5 percent of its value since early October and almost 50 percent since the start of 2008, buffeted by the global economic meltdown which has hit share prices around the world.

Trillions of dollars have been thrown at failed banks and frozen financial markets in the biggest challenge to free-market capitalism since the Great Depression. Outside the high-rise stock exchange in Jakarta's business district, 43-year-old gardener Ari watered the decorative plants and tended the lawn under the blazing sun. It makes no difference to me," he said. "Everything is just as difficult as before."

He offered a word of advice about frugality which the rich executives of Lehman Brothers and Bear Stearns might wish they had heard before the economic whirlwind sank their firms.

- **ASEAN leaders to hold crisis meeting next week**

Southeast Asian leaders will meet in Beijing next week to discuss measures to deal with the global financial crisis, the regional bloc's top official said on Friday. The secretary-general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Surin Pitsuwan, said the summit of the 10-nation grouping will be held on Oct. 23 or Oct. 24, and may also include leaders from China, Japan and South Korea. "I like to stress this is certainly not a panic reaction. This is a precautionary step. We know that is extremely critical," Surin told reporters in the Malaysian capital. "No matter how strong, how resilient we are, how good we are, we will be affected one way or the other," he said. Surin said the ASEAN meeting would discuss ways to support the currencies of member countries by strengthening the emergency fund already in place. "I think that (meeting in Beijing) is good. The issue is legitimate. We do believe that we are in better shape than 10 years ago," Surin said. Asian leaders are already due to meet their European counterparts in Beijing for the Asia-Europe summit (ASEM) on Oct. 24-25, where talks are bound to focus on the crisis.

- **Indonesia lifts trading ban on minister's firms**

Indonesia lifted a trading ban on three firms controlled by the billionaire welfare minister Friday, an official said amid reports of a government rescue plan for his debt-ridden group.

The companies belong to or are controlled by the family of Aburizal Bakrie, the country's richest man and a powerful member of the Golkar party which dominates President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's ruling coalition. "We had suspended trading as the group was undergoing restructuring. But it has since sold some assets. The company has stabilised," Indonesian stock exchange chief Erry Firmansyah said.

Bakrie Sumatera Plantations, Property Company Bakrieland Development and Bakrie Telecommunication resumed trading for the first time since they were suspended amid market turmoil on October 7.Dealers said the stocks fell by 10 percent each in a generally bearish market. Indonesia's main index has fallen 3.6 percent since the start of the week and 49 percent since the start of 2008.Trading in three other firms — parent company Bakrie & Brothers, Energy Mega Persada and the world's largest exporter of thermal coal, Bumi Resources — was still suspended, Firmansyah said. Shares in Bakrie & Brothers and its five subsidiaries crashed by 25 to more than 40 percent on October 7 before the authorities halted trade

- **Indonesia may delay first global Islamic bond**

Indonesia's first global Islamic bond is likely to be delayed because of financial market turmoil, a minister said on Friday, a further blow after the government cancelled all domestic debt auctions for the rest of this year.

Southeast Asia's biggest economy had originally hoped to raise between $500 million to $1 billion from the sale of the Islamic bond, or sukuk, but "is unlikely to do it now, given market conditions," Minister Paskah Suzetta told Reuters. Indonesia has responded to the current global financial crisis with measures ranging from greater protection for bank deposits to efforts to improve liquidity and avoid a credit crunch.

The central bank has intervened in currency markets to support the rupiah while the Indonesia Stock Exchange halted trading for three days last week in an attempt to prevent heavy losses. The government had planned to sell the dollar-denominated sukuk, which was expected to have a maturity of 5-10 years, in November, with a road show scheduled for the fourth week of October. The Finance Ministry had originally said the amount could be around $1 billion, but more recently it said that the amount would depend on market conditions.

Last week, Indonesia's finance ministry said it would cancel planned domestic debt auctions this year due to turmoil in financial markets, and would only consider resuming the debt sales if conditions stabilized. The most populous Muslim nation raised 4.7

trillion rupiah from the sales of its first Islamic bonds in late August, short of its five trillion rupiah target. Indonesia has a population of 226 million people, and about 85 percent are Muslim.

Social Front

Malaysia

Political front

- **Malaysia: MPs fear change of govt, charges opposition leader**

Political change in Malaysia is possible, but MPs from the ruling coalition fear government reprisals if they back the opposition, its leader, Anwar Ibrahim, told Adnkronos International (AKI)."A sufficient number of MPs (from the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition) have pledged to support us. We have signatures, but need to proceed cautiously," Anwar said. He leads a three-party opposition alliance, the Pakatan Rakyat, and faces what he says are politically motivated charges of sodomy. "We have already tried to negotiate with (prime minister Abdullah) Badawi for a peaceful change of government, but this has fallen on deaf ears, and now we need to find another way," he stated. On 18 September, Anwar had asked Abdullah to convene a special session of the Parliament to debate a no-confidence motion. Abdullah refused, saying the parliament was due to re-open on 13 October, and that Anwar should table the motion for that date. But Anwar told AKI that doing so would have been pointless. "Under the Malaysian system, the Parliament's speaker has the power to include or exclude items from its daily business," he said.

Experts agree that among the options open to Anwar is for BN politicians to symbolically 'cross the floor' of the Parliament to the opposition benches, showing the government it no longer has a majority.

Another possibility is to invoke the help of Malaysia's Sultan, Tunaku Mizan Zaainal Abidin, whose powers include sacking Prime Ministers who no longer have a parliamentary majority, as well as asking majority leaders to form a government.

Both courses action are possibilities, Anwar said. But he declined to set a date for either, noting only that they involve lengthy procedures, which could endanger 'rebel' MPs. The government could use Malaysia's Internal Security Act to intimidate lawmakers, according to political commentator and former MP for the Chinese Democratic Action Party, Sim Kwang Yang. Under the legislation, the government can arrest individuals and detain them for an indefinite period without trial. It has frequently been used to muzzle the Malaysian opposition. Anwar claims that at least 31 MPs from the ruling coalition have said they will join him. This would give Anwar enough parliamentary votes to govern: he already controls 82 seats and the BN has 140 seats in the 222-seat legislature. Anwar was sacked as deputy Prime Minister in 1998 and in the late 1990s was jailed for six years for sodomy and corruption - allegations he always denied.

- **Indonesia, Malaysia to improve trade cooperation**

Indonesia and Malaysia agreed at a two-day commission beginning on Tuesday to look into the definition of border trade stipulated by their border agreement signed in 1970 and revised in 2006, The Jakarta Post quoted an Indonesian official as saying.

"We have so many borders with Malaysia and we actually have not agreed yet on a comprehensive definition of border trade in the agreement," said Gusmardi Bustami, international trade cooperation director general of the Trade Ministry, on Friday. Indonesia and Malaysia also identified the problems and barriers to improve trade and investment cooperation at the commission. The step is being taken, following a projected slowdown in the United States, the European Union.

Economic Front

- **Malaysia reviewing policy on iron & steel sector**

THE government is reviewing the current policy on the iron and steel industry in line with the objectives outlined under the Third Industrial Master Plan (IMP3), Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Jacob Dungau Sagan said. He said the

reason for reviewing the policy, among others, was to support Malaysia's commitment towards the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and the Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA).Jacob said that the FTAs not only provided market access opportunities for the metal sector but also a more predictable environment for facilitating investment." Malaysia's bilateral FTA negotiations with Chile, India, the United States, Australia and New Zealand are in progress. We have concluded and implemented bilateral FTAs with Japan and Pakistan," he said at the official opening of the Metal Technology Show 2008 in Kuala Lumpur today.

He added that together with other Asean members, Malaysia is also actively negotiating FTAs with the European Union, India, Australia and New Zealand. "To ensure that tariff liberalization does not result in the importation of products of substandard quality, the government is also considering proposals from the industry for products to be imposed with a mandatory Malaysian standard," he said. "Currently, the domestic steel industry faces new challenges. Some of these relate to the decrease in local production and sales partly due to a drop in domestic demand and consumption," he said, adding that the government was also considering various options to resolve the current situation. He encouraged Malaysians to consume local steel products in order to assist the development of the domestic industry.

He revealed that overall; the metal industry had recorded an improved performance in 2007 with the production in iron and steel products increasing by seven per cent to 11.3 million metric tons. The export of iron and steel products also grew at 12.4 per cent to RM10.5 billion, while approved investments registered a substantial increase with 37 projects valued at RM12 billion approved in 2007, he said.

- **Malaysia inflation seen easing in September**

Malaysian inflation is likely to ease slightly in September but hold around near-27 year highs, offering the central bank little room for any near-term interest rate cuts, a Reuters poll showed. Annual inflation is expected to slow to 8.3 percent in September from 8.5 percent in August, which was the highest level since December 1981, according to the median of a poll of 11 economists. Lower oil prices will be the key driver for lower inflation, while food prices are likely remain high due to seasonal pressures, analysts

said. “We expect sustained high food inflation, partly elevated by the seasonal pressure during Ramadan month, to offset lower transport inflation due to cuts in gasoline prices,” said ING economist Prakash Sakpal. reuters

- **Water shortage crisis looms over Malaysia**

Many parts of Malaysia face a lack of water although the country has renewable water that is five times per head higher than that in many regions in the world.And poor water management is the culprit, said Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Douglas Unggah Embas.

The country's per capita renewable water was about 5,000 cubic metres per year compared to many regions in the world that had less than 1,000 cubic metres, he said when opening the Third Water and Environment Partnership in Asia (WEPA) International Forum on Water Environmental Governance on Wednesday.

Obviously, this problem was attributed to unsustainable management of water resources rather than to the quantity of water available for domestic, industrial and agricultural uses, he said.His speech was delivered by his deputy, Datuk Maznah Mazlan. Douglas said that, for example, a recent study indicated that only 40 per cent of the country's lakes and reservoirs were in good condition."As these water bodies hold large volumes of water that can be utilised during droughts, the management of water quality has become increasingly critical," he said.WEPA, a programme initiated under the Japanese Ministry of Environment following the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan, in 2003 has chosen Malaysia to hold the two-day forum beginning Wednesday.

- **Petrol prices down five cents, diesel 10 cents**

Pump prices are down again - the second time in just over a week. The last time fuel prices were cut was on Oct 7.

On Thursday, Shell took the lead by reducing prices at 10.30am, followed by Singapore Petroleum Company (SPC) and Exxon Mobil at 11.30am, and finally Caltex at noon. All four companies have cut petrol prices by five cents per liter for all fuel grades, and 10

cents a litre for diesel. Premium 95 grade now stands at S$1.846 a litre before discounts, while the price of diesel is reduced to S$1.603. The latest revision follows a series of petrol price cuts since July 2008, after a drop in crude oil prices. Crude oil futures were down more than 50 per cent from record highs of above US$147 reached in July, when prices rocketed on fears of supply disruptions. New York's main futures contract, light sweet crude for November delivery, was down US$2.06 at US$72.48 a barrel after sinking as low as US$71.21.

Social Front

Thailand

Political front

- **Thai gov't to give 120 days to write new constitution**

Thailand cabinet on Tuesday said that the country's new constitution drafting committee (CDA) should be given a revised timeframe of 120 days instead of the previous 240 days to amend the 2007 Constitution.

Thai Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister Somsak Prissanananthakul was quoted by the Thai News Agency as saying that the CDA should finish rewriting the Charter article within 120 days as the government might be criticized for setting up the CDA to buy time for itself to continue in office. Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat and coalition parties agreed that the timeframe will be cut by half from 240 days to 120 days, said Culture Minister Worawat Ua-apinyakul.

Deputy Finance Minister Pradit Phattharaprasit said that he was confident that the CDA revision of the charter will be accepted by all sides before the next election. Pradit said he believed the opposition party would return to join the joint panel of the government, senate, and house speaker to set up the CDA after the timeframe was cut short.

- **Thai Supreme Court Convicts Thaksin**

Thailand's Supreme Court convicted deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra of abuse of power and sentenced him to two years in prison for helping his wife secure a land deal.

The verdict is likely to spur ongoing protests against a government aligned with the exiled Mr. Thaksin, further destabilizing this divided nation.After Mr. Thaksin was ousted in a military coup in 2006, he was charged with a number of corruption-related offenses, all of which he denied, and many of which remain unresolved. He jumped bail in August and fled to Britain, claiming he wouldn't get a fair trial in Thailand. He said Tuesday's conviction was "politically motivated" and "a carry forward of the coup d'état" against him, the Associated Press reported.The Supreme Court ruled Mr. Thaksin abused his authority by helping his wife purchase a valuable piece of land near Bangkok's business district from a government agency in 2003. The verdict was the first in which a Thai politician was convicted of corruption that occurred while serving as prime minister.Political analysts say the verdict could intensify Thailand's political conflicts and weaken the survival prospects of its current government, which is comprised mostly of pro-Thaksin politicians and headed by Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, Mr. Thaksin's brother-in-law.

Thai protesters in front of a banner calling for the arrest of Thaksin Shinawatra and his wife on Oct. 7.For the past three years, supporters and critics of Mr. Thaksin have competed in a sometimes violent tussle for power. In late August, thousands of demonstrators seized the main government complex in Bangkok. They are still occupying it in a bid to force Mr. Thaksin's allies from power. Their primary goal is to uproot Thailand's Western-style democracy, which they contend that cash-rich populists such as Mr. Thaksin can easily manipulate, and replace it with a system where bureaucrats and other civic groups have a greater say in selecting parliament.

- **Thai PM refuses to quit as thousands rally in Bangkok**

Thailand's powerful army chief on Thursday had hinted that the premier should resign over the clashes, prompting rumours that Somchai may heed his advice and dissolve parliament. But despite calling an urgent meeting of his coalition partners, Somchai insisted he would stay on for the sake of the country. "The government cannot abandon its duty as we still have three key functions coming up," he said in a televised statement, referring to two royal events and a regional summit to be held before the end of the year.

"Whether I resign or do not resign will depend on national interest." At the downtown rally, PAD supporters handed out books and CDs with photos and accounts of last week's violence. "The truth will show why the government has no legitimacy to run the country," Somsak Kosaisuk, a PAD leader, told the crowd, many wearing black to mourn the dead supporters or yellow out of allegiance to the king.

The PAD launched its campaign in May, claiming that the ruling People Power Party elected in December was a puppet of ousted and exiled premier Thaksin Shinawatra, whom it accuses of corruption and nepotism. The crowd - which police estimated at 5,000 - seemed largely cheerful Friday, sheltering from the sun under a sea of umbrellas. The rally ended without incident at about 1:00 pm (0600 GMT) after the protesters marched to the main shopping district and dispersed.

Somchai has repeatedly said he is not overly attached to the position of prime minister but wants to stay in office to oversee amendments to the constitution, which was drafted by a panel installed by the junta that ousted Thaksin in 2006.

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- **Malaysia to ask for Thailand, Cambodia to settle conflicts peacefully**

Malaysia is expected to ask for Thailand, Cambodia to solve their conflicts peacefully in the spirit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a senior official said on Tuesday.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Dais Yatim made this remark at a hotel in Putrajaya, administrative center of the Malaysian Federal Government, after he had a luncheon with the heads of missions of Americas in Malaysia.

He also hoped that more ASEAN countries would join to ask for Thailand and Cambodia to discuss ways to solve the problem between them without involvement of arms. Dais was scheduled to visit Thailand late Tuesday and Wednesday, according to the Malaysian Foreign Ministry.

- **Thai army denies government rift**

The supreme commander of Thailand's armed forces has denied rifts between the military and the government, saying the two were working fine.
"We can work together," said Supreme Commander Gen Songkitti Jakkabatra at a royal ceremony in the capital Bangkok.

Thailand has been in the grip of political tensions for months, ever since protesters opposed to the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra began a campaign to bring down the current government who they say are his proxies.

Politically polarized

Thailand's supreme commander told journalists that the relationship between the army and the government was that relationship has been under some strain recently, after his army chief refused to use force to evict anti-government protesters from the prime minister's office, and then suggested on national television that the prime minister should resign. That relationship may be put to the test again next week, when former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is to address a rally of his supporters by telephone from London.

- **Thailand, Cambodia meet on border dispute**

Thai and Cambodian military officials met Thursday in an attempt to defuse tensions over a border dispute that briefly erupted into deadly clashes last week.The meeting between the mid-level officials in Cambodia's northwestern tourist hub Siem Reap is meant to pave the way for talks between senior military commanders on Friday.

The talks are aimed at calming a simmering territorial dispute over land near the ancient Preah Vihear temple, which broke into a firefight that killed one Thai and three Cambodian soldiers on October 15.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Thai Premier Somchai Wongsawat are also scheduled to hold talks in Beijing on Friday on the sidelines of a meeting between leaders of Asian and European nations. Shots were exchanged last week between soldiers stationed on disputed land near the temple, which belongs to Cambodia. Cambodian and Thai military officials agreed to joint border patrols the day after the clashes, although Cambodian commanders have since reneged on the deal, saying such patrols are not possible in disputed areas. Tensions between the neighbors flared in July when Preah Vihear was awarded World Heritage status, rekindling long-running tensions over ownership of land surrounding the temple.

- **UN action needed for border row, groups say**

CIVIL society groups on Monday criticized the government for not appealing to the United Nations for help in its ongoing standoff with Thailand over disputed territory along the border.

At least thee Cambodian soldiers are dead after clashes last week with Thai troops on the border near Preah Vihear temple.

"Despite the fact that both sides sustained injuries of a similar magnitude, we are still filled with regret for the loss of our soldiers," he said.

Early on in the three-month standoff, Cambodia threatened to file a formal complaint with the UN Security Council, but quickly backed down. Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphan said Monday that the UN and several "big countries" had encouraged Cambodia to choose negotiations.

"We have already written to the UN and sent information to Asean and UNESCO. If these measures don't work, we will find another way," he said.

- **Thailand, Cambodia meet**

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Economic Front

- **Honda opens new plant in Thailand**

Honda Motor Co said Tuesday that operations have begun to turn out the Accord sedan at its Thai unit's second plant, built next to its existing plant in Ayutthaya.The new facility, set up at a cost of 6.2 billion baht, or about 18.6 billion yen, will double Honda Automobile (Thailand) Co's vehicle output capacity in Thailand to 240,000 units, the Japanese automaker said. The first plant currently has an annual production capacity of 120,000 units.

Social Front

- **Deposed Prime Minister of Thailand guilty of corruption**

A court in Thailand has found deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra guilty of corruption and sentenced him to two years imprisonment. But he is unlikely to serve any time because he is living in exile in England after escaping from Thailand when he was summonsed to court. The case is one of several corruption allegations against Thaksin.

His wife used her husband's political influence to buy land from a government agency for about a third of its estimated value. The billionaire is accused of bending government policy to benefit his family.

Singapore

Political/Social front

- **China, Singapore sign free trade agreement**

China and Singapore signed a free trade agreement Thursday to bolster their economies ahead of an Asia-Europe summit focusing on the global financial crisis.

Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the agreement would improve bilateral ties and advance regional cooperation in East Asia, China's official Xinhua News Agency reported.Chinese President Hu Jintao said the agreement signals that "economic ties between the two countries have entered a new stage," Xinhua said.Lee is in Beijing to attend the seventh Asia-Europe Meeting, or ASEM, to be held Oct. 24-25.

The summit, held every two years, is expected to seek a consensus ahead of a meeting of world leaders in Washington on Nov. 15 to address the global financial crisis.

- **PM Lee says nations need better coordination to tide over crisis**

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has said countries need better coordination and mutual understanding to tide over the current financial crisis.One way, he said, is to push for linkages between Asia and the European Union, and focus on promoting free trade. Mr Lee said this in an interview with Chinese reporters in Singapore, ahead of his visit to Beijing on Wednesday. Prime Minister Lee said governments will have to act to stabilise their economies and restore growth through fiscal policy and coordinated action.

For now, countries will have to keep their economies moving, step up investment internally, and gradually increase domestic consumption. He said the turmoil's impact on Asia is indirect because Asian banks are largely sound. But Asia will be affected when the developed countries are in recession.Prime Minister Lee said stronger internal demand in countries like China, in particular, will provide a buffer from weakening exports. Under the current economic climate, Mr Lee said China can contribute constructively by pursuing sustainable development and being an active participant in global issues, as it is now a stakeholder in the international system. He said the China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement is not just of bilateral significance, but one with Mr Lee, who arrived in Beijing on Wednesday, will attend the Asia Europe Summit on Friday. He is also expected to witness the signing of the Singapore-China Free Trade Agreement.

Economic Front

- **Govt expenditure to increase by 3% of GDP in five years' time**

The Singapore government expects to spend about three per cent more of its gross domestic product (GDP) annually over the next five years.

Finance Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam told Parliament on Monday that the government wants to increase the amount of investment returns from the country's reserves that can be used for spending. A bill was tabled in Parliament to amend the constitution and enable the government to tap into capital gains on top of interest and dividend income, among other changes. As Singapore's society ages, there will be greater demand for healthcare and other sectors.

The increasing income gap also means the government will look at schemes to help lower income citizens. This will require greater spending by the government and is one of three reasons why it expects an increase in future expenditure .These include improving the quality of education, workforce training, and research and development. All this must be done by keeping taxes low.

The government notes that with tax rates coming down internationally, Singapore has to be prepared to make further cuts in direct taxes to maintain competitiveness. The government also plans to spend more to enhance living standards in Singapore. A substantial portion will go into Singapore's transport network. The coverage of expressways and railways will be expanded.

The government currently spends about 15 per cent of the country's GDP. And while this projected additional amount is substantial, the country's total expenditure as a percentage of GDP will still be among the lowest internationally. Under the proposed new spending rules, the government plans to consider long term expected returns instead of year-to-year data. It also plans to only spend out of real returns adjusted for global inflation." The framework will give the President the final say on the projected long term expected rate of return. Looking at long term expected returns will smoothen out the investment volatility. This will be calculated based on an investment horizon of 20 years, roughly

three investment cycles in global markets and revised annually. Making calculations based on real returns will also factor in the international purchasing power of reserves.

- **Singapore's September non-oil domestic exports down 5.7% on-year**

Singapore's non-oil domestic exports fell 5.7 per cent in September as compared to the same period last year, due to lower exports of both electronics and non-electronic products.

On a month-on-month seasonally adjusted basis, non-oil domestic exports fell 0.8 per cent. Singapore's non-oil domestic exports to China, Indonesia, South Korea and Hong Kong grew, but those to other top markets such as the United States and European Union countries fell.

According to data from IE Singapore, domestic exports of electronic goods fell 11 per cent compared to last year. This was because of lower sales of consumer electronics, telecommunications equipment and disk drives. Non-electronic exports were 1.9 per cent lower due to reduced exports of pharmaceuticals, disk media products, specialized machinery and metalworking machinery.

While the overall decline may not be as bad as feared, since some had forecast a 9 per cent drop in non-oil domestic exports in September, economists said the outlook is still a cloudy one.

For now, the numbers show that the global downturn is hurting shipments from Singapore. Exports to the US – Singapore's single-largest export market – have continued to be sluggish, down by 24.5 per cent in September from a year earlier. Shipments to the European Union fell by 23.6 per cent.

Non-oil domestic exports account for about 70 per cent of Singapore's gross domestic product. The country's economy is already deemed to be in technical recession after posting two straight quarters of contraction.

- **S'pore govt warns of slower growth and higher unemployment ahead**

Trade and Industry Minister Lim Hng Kiang has said the country is set for several quarters of slower growth. Speaking in Parliament on Monday, Mr Lim said this could stretch on for longer, depending on the state of the global economy.

Singapore, an open economy, cannot escape the impact of the financial crisis and the global economic slowdown. It is already in a technical recession and there are signs this is affecting the job market.

The financial turmoil has hit the property, retail and tourism industries. For the construction sector, Mr Lim said it is expected to grow by 7.8 per cent in the third quarter of this year, falling short of the 18 per cent growth registered in the first half of 2008.

And construction on projects like the Downtown mass rapid transit line is expected to contribute strongly to the economy, but the slower growth is due to weaker market sentiments, contractor shortage and equipment delays.

Still, government projects will add S$13.5 billion to the economy this year and the government will bring forward more public sector projects, if needed. For professional workers, Mr Lim is hopeful as foreign companies like Halliburton and Qualcomm launch their Singapore operations this quarter.

- **S'pore's financial system is sound, S$150b guarantee for deposits sufficient**

The Singapore government has said its financial system is robust and it will be able to pay for all the Singapore dollar deposits it has guaranteed.

Speaking in Parliament on Monday, Trade and Industry Minister Lim Hng Kiang said that if the government should have to pay out money for failed banks, it may need to draw on past reserves. The Singapore government announced on October 16 that it was guaranteeing all Singapore dollar and foreign currency bank deposits until 31 December 2010.

In Parliament, MPs kept equating the guarantee on deposits with a bailout package. However, Mr Lim stressed that Singapore banks do not face funding difficulties. Despite

this, he said that Singapore has guaranteed deposits to ensure an international level playing field for banks, for if Singapore had not done so, people could move their deposits to other countries which have guaranteed deposits. The guarantee will also boost confidence in Singapore's financial system and the move is critical as financial services are an important part of Singapore's economy.

That is because the guarantee will only be called on if a bank's assets are not enough to repay depositors. "The provision of a government guarantee on deposits is a necessary temporary measure to protect the interests of Singaporeans and the economy, which are in turn dependent on a strong and competitive financial sector. The risk of drawing on the guarantee and potential impact on Singapore's reserves are low." Mr Lim said the guarantee on deposits is measured, precautionary actions that will help Singapore pull through this global economic slowdown. It will also help the country cope with the ongoing financial crisis in international markets. The Trade and Industry Minister said: "This is something that we are very mindful of and MAS - in its supervision of the various banks, especially branches of foreign banks in Singapore - will insist that as the deposits increase in their branch here, they have corresponding liquid assets which are invested in Singapore to match these deposits."

- **SMEs can improve credit profile to get funding**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are finding it harder to get funding, as banks tighten credit lines amid the spiralling financial crisis. However, one of the ways SMEs can improve their standing with lenders is by putting their credit background into a database, or credit bureau.

By doing so, SMEs that regularly repay loans could make such information easily available to lenders, and improve their reputations as reliable borrowers. Credit bureaus are of particular help to small firms who do not have their reports publicly audited, which can create the wrong impression with banks. There are currently credit bureaus in Singapore that cater to firms and individuals in different industries.

- **Process industry in Singapore relatively sheltered from financial turmoil**

The chemicals sector in Singapore has been buoyed by rising oil prices and demand for chemical products. As a result of this growth, companies which provide engineering and maintenance services for the chemicals industry are likely to be sheltered from the current financial turmoil. The process industry in Singapore, which includes the chemical and petrochemical sectors, is expected to see investments of S$15 billion in the next three to five years, up from S$10 billion in the last three years. The process industry involves the conversion of raw materials into finished products. And companies which provide support and maintenance services for the chemical sector have been seeing strong growth.

Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Singapore Finance Minister, said: "The process supporting industry happens to be doing quite well at a time when many other industries are facing more difficult prospects over the next year or two. While most companies expect some slowing due to the current financial crisis, they said their order books are still robust. And Singapore agencies are also doing their part to support the sector. For example, the Economic Development Board and IE Singapore have worked together on several public-private partnership projects on areas like market development. The production of petroleum, petrochemicals and specialty chemicals overtook electronics as the largest contributor to manufacturing output last year.

- **Energy companies hit by lack of liquidity and slowing demand**

Energy companies are feeling the heat of the credit crunch. According to industry players, the lack of liquidity in the market is hurting demand for energy-related products. And slowing demand is expected to continue into next year.

Oil prices are now trading at just about half of their peak just three months ago. This, coupled with tightening liquidity worldwide, has left energy-producing countries with a surplus in petroleum products. And industry players are now faced with the problem of managing this overflow.
The outlook is no brighter for alternative energies. Oslo-based solar energy company Renewable Energy Corp is reporting that limited credit availability could also dampen

demand for its products.
But some industry watchers said this may be just for the short term. They expect demand to kick back into full swing once the markets start to pick up. Over the next 12 months, all eyes will continue to be fixed on Asia for energy demand growth, due to flat and declining demand from Europe and the United States. China and India's rapid GDP growth is expected to become a key driver as to whether oil prices go up or down in the coming months.

- **ILO says ASEAN's unemployment rate could go up if crisis continues**

The International Labor Organization has warned that with economic growth hit by the financial crisis, ASEAN's unemployment rate - which had been improving - could get worse, and the more developed ASEAN countries are going to be worst hit.

Singapore's Acting Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong opened the first ASEAN Human Resource Summit on Wednesday with a call to boost the quality of labor, so that ASEAN can enjoy sustained growth. Even corporate agree that it was a timely message if ASEAN wants to continue to draw foreign investments.

On Monday, the International Labor Organization had said that ASEAN is already facing a growing shortage of managers and skilled professionals. Unemployment could rise from the 5.7 per cent last year to 6.2 per cent next year. In fact, a recent survey of Malaysian companies showed employers projecting a 5 per cent to 28 per cent cut in their workforce. These are sobering numbers, but there is comfort for some workers. "Most companies would have some foreign workers in their employment, and by law most companies would actually have to lay off the foreign workers first, before they lay off the local workers. So in that sense, we expect the impact on local workers to be controlled and minimized." To avoid lay offs; businesses will have to look at cutting costs.

The important take-home message for workers is that in these times, boosting productivity and raising competitiveness are going to be that much more important. The new International Labor Organization report said this is going to be even more crucial for the more developed ASEAN countries. This is because in terms of productivity, China

has already exceeded ASEAN, and India is fast catching up. The one-day ASEAN Human Resource Summit was attended by representatives from the 10-member grouping and international experts.

Social Front

Philippine

Political/Economic front

- **Moro rebels raid south Philippine village, kill one**

Muslim rebels raided a village in the southern Philippines and killed a pro-government militiaman, a regional military spokesman said yesterday.

Major Randolph Cabangbang said the wife of the killed man was also wounded in the attack carried out late on Thursday by Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas in Guindulungan town in Maguindanao province, 960km south of Manila. Cabangbang said more troops have been dispatched to the area to pursue the rebels who fled to a forest swamp. Fighting between the MILF and government troops escalated in August after the Supreme Court stopped the signing of a territory deal that would have expanded the existing Muslim autonomous region in Mindanao Island.

More than 200 people have been killed and more than 500,000 displaced in the fighting. Meanwhile, the Philippine army said on Thursday that thirteen Muslim rebels were killed in a two-day military offensive on the island of Mindanao. Ground attack aircraft and artillery pounded a Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) hideout on a marshy area near Datu Piang after the military was tipped off that senior MILF leader Ameril Umbrakato was in the area, said Colonel Marlo Salazar, the local army commander. The attacks were a riposte to the Supreme Court's decision to block a draft peace agreement with the Philippine government that would have given the MILF control of more than 700 villages in the south. The decision immediately put the Philippine Army on high alert amid

warnings of violent repercussions. "Our advancing ground troops confirmed the rebel fatalities, but we do not know whether Umbrakato was among them," Salazar said. The government has put up a bounty for information leading to the arrest of Umbrakato and fellow MILF leader Abdurahman Macapaar.

- **Arroyo vows no let-up in army offensive**

President Gloria Arroyo inspects recovered firearms from Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels during her visit to the military camp in Cotabato city, southern Philippines, yesterday

Cotabato City: President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo yesterday vowed no let-up in the military offensive against Muslim rebels who seized villages and attacked towns in a strife-torn southern region of Mindanao.

Arroyo visited an army camp near Cotabato City yesterday and exhorted soldiers to continue operations against Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels who launched attacks in the nearby provinces in August.

Arroyo said she was still determined to find peaceful solution to the Muslim insurgency in Mindanao despite the ongoing operations against selected MILF rebels.

The MILF rebels launched the attacks in August after the Supreme Court blocked a territory deal between the government and guerrilla peace negotiators that would have expanded the existing autonomous Muslim region in Mindanao. Earlier this week, the Supreme Court declared as unconstitutional the territory deal known as the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain.

More than 200 people have been killed and more than 500,000 displaced in subsequent clashes between government troops and MILF rebels.

- **Philippines lures rebels with cash for guns**

The Philippine government on Sunday said it would pay 1,063 dollars for every M-16 assault rifle surrendered by a communist insurgent who abandoned the long-running rebellion.

The money would be on top of another 70,000 pesos in cash and livelihood assistance to be extended to any New People's Army (NPA) rebel turning over a new leaf, said the government's chief peace adviser Hermogenes Esperon. "The amount is more than enough for a former rebel to start his or her own small business," Esperon said in a statement. The NPA is the armed unit of the underground Communist Party of the Philippines, which has been waging a Maoist rebellion since 1969. The government estimates the NPA force at about 5,000 at present, down from more than 26,000 in the 1980s, following the collapse of communism worldwide and defeats on the battlefield. Esperon did not say how many firearms the rebels have, although the M-16 is their usual weapon.

Catholic priest survives attack by insurgents

A Catholic priest survived an attack by suspected Al Qaeda-linked militants yesterday in the southern Philippines, but four of his security escorts were wounded, a Marine officer said.

The priest, identified as Mon Libot, and his security escorts of Marines and pro-government militiamen were aboard a vehicle when they were attacked by suspected Abu Sayyaf rebels in Sumisip town in Basilan province, 900km south of Manila. The officer said the priest was unhurt except for bruises on his body, while the four wounded security escorts were being treated in a nearby hospital. More troops were dispatched to the area to pursue the attackers. The Abu Sayyaf is the smallest but most violent Muslim rebel group in the southern Philippines. The group was responsible for deadly terrorist attacks and high-profile kidnapping cases in the country.

Economic Front

- **Unscathed from the global financial crisis**

THE Philippines has so far escaped relatively unscathed from the global financial crisis, but its export industries are bracing themselves for tougher times ahead, analysts say. While orders for the remainder of the year still look healthy, exporters fear that going

forward into 2009 the outlook might not be so rosy, especially if the United States slips into recession as expected.

The export sector is hugely important for the Southeast Asian nation, accounting for about 45 per cent of its economy. Philippine exports last year rose 6.1 per cent to US$50.3 billion (S$74.3 billion) and the government expects growth of about 5.0 per cent this year. But in 2009 exports are expected to see zero to 4.0 per cent growth, according to the government's own Development Budget Coordination Committee. The Philippines' main exports are electronic components used by manufacturers overseas to produce finished products from computers to washing machines. Last year they comprised more than half of all exports, with the main destination being the United States.

And he is not too downbeat concerning prospects for 2009. 'Exports will be affected but not as much as some people predict,' he said. the weakening of the Philippine peso and rise of new export sectors such as mining have been a boost, he added. But the United States remains the single biggest buyer of Philippine goods, purchasing at least 16 per cent of total exports each month, and any downturn in the US economy will also have an impact on the Philippine economy beyond exports going there. The electronics industry could be particularly vulnerable as developed countries are the main market. But this optimism is tempered by Trade Undersecretary Aquino, who warns that 'it's not that easy' simply to enter new markets as the government weighs up a challenging future.

- **Govt to consider restarting some of deferred building projects if need arises**

Domestic construction demand is expected to reach close to S$30b this year compared to S$17b in 2006.But National Development Minister Mah Bow Tan warned the industry is expected to see a slowdown with the current economic situation. Mr Mah was speaking at the Singapore Contractors Association's 71st Annual Dinner. He said that if the need arises, the government will restart some of the deferred public sector projects, worth S$4.7b, to take up the slack in the industry. If this happens, it must be timed carefully to ensure there is no constraint on the availability of skilled manpower, equipment and other resources. Still, Mr Mah said, this will not be enough to keep the industry going. Builders

must constantly challenge themselves to come up with innovative construction methods that will enable Singapore to grow, without compromising our quality of life and adversely harming the environment, said Mr Mah.

A "Green and Considerate Builders Scheme" will be launched soon to recognize builders for their efforts in adopting environmentally friendly construction methods.

Enviromental Front

Vietnam

Political front/Economic Front.

- **Vietnam to deepen partnership with China: Vietnamese official**

Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's upcoming China visit will deepen the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation, said the neighboring country's minister to China here on Friday.

Nguyen Vinh Quang said Dung would pay an official visit to China from Oct. 20 to 25 at the invitation of Premier Wen Jiabao. While here, he will attend the seventh Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Beijing. He will also meet with Chinese leaders and visit the southern Hainan Province.

It will be his first official visit to China since becoming prime minister in 2006. The visit aims to deepen the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation, further promote the bilateral cooperation of economy and trade and push forward the settlement of the boundary demarcation work, according to Vietnamese Minister Counselor Dang Minh Khoi.

- **Vietnam cuts prime rate amid global turmoil**

Vietnam's central bank on Tuesday cut the benchmark interest rate by one percentage point to 13 per cent in a bid to free up credit for enterprises amid the global financial crisis.

The monetary loosening reverses a series of three hikes this year, from 8.25 per cent to 14 per cent, which had aimed to reduce liquidity and curb the country's double-digit inflation.

The State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) said in an online statement that the year's first benchmark rate cut was "designed to make more capital available to commercial banks to increase liquidity and cut lending rates." Vietnam, a major producer of manufactured goods such as garments and footwear and commodities including rice, coffee and seafood, could be hit hard by downturns in the United States, Europe and other export markets.

The state-run Vietnam News Agency said "top policy-makers are concerned that the difficulties faced by local companies may badly affect this year's seven per cent economic growth target." The bank doubled the interest rate it pays on compulsory reserves for banks to 10 per cent.
It also said it would buy back more than 20 trillion dong (1.2 billion dollars) of compulsory bills it had sold in March to curb inflation, which last month slowed to 27.9 per cent from 28.3 per cent in August.

- **Finance Ministry to oversee foreign loans**

The Ministry of Finance will assume responsibility for all foreign loans taken out by provincial governments, if legislation considered by the National Assembly Wednesday is passed. “According to most of opinions from the Finance and Budget Committee of the National Assembly of Vietnam, localities should not be allowed to actively negotiate or sign documents for overseas loans,” Committee Chairman Phung Quoc Hien said as he presented a report on the Bill on Public Debt Management Board.

The bill also states that People’s Committees will have to work with relevant agencies on any overseas loan negotiations. The Prime Minister will also have to approve any foreign loans, which will be taken out by the national government and then lent to the provincial authority.

The National Assembly's Finance and Budget Committee said the parliament should approve long-and medium-term debt management plans, as well as annual borrowing and repayment plans.Under the proposed new law, debts guaranteed by the government and loans taken out by provincial governments will be considered part of the national government's debt. The National Assembly Standing Committee also proposed the parliament, at its fifth session next May, approve 12 bills, including housing, intellectual property and urban planning legislation

- **Pact signed to set up economic zone in Vietnam**

China and Vietnam Wednesday signed an agreement to build an economic and trade cooperation zone in Haiphong, the third largest city in the Southeast Asian country.

The zone will be modeled on Shenzhen, China's first special economic zone and the leading city in its reforms.

The mayors of Shenzhen and Haiphong signed the agreement in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing to build the 800-hectare China-Vietnam economic and trade cooperation zone.

The pact was inked after Premier Wen Jiabao held an hour-long meeting with visiting Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung.The foundation for the zone will be laid in December, and the cost of its infrastructure construction will be about $200 million. More than 170 companies are likely to set up shop there, investing up to $5 billion.

The zone will be divided into two parts, with one for light industries, including apparel and electronics, and the other dedicated to sectors such as logistics.

The two sides inked seven other agreements, including one on preferential loan from the Export-Import Bank of China to Vietnam and another on a strategic cooperation between China's third largest oil company, China National Offshore Oil Corp, and Petro Vietnam. The two sides agreed to set up a hotline, too, linking leaders of the two neighbors.

Social Front

- **Human Rights Watch Monitoring Crackdown on Catholics**

The Vietnamese government should immediately release Roman Catholics arrested for holding peaceful prayer vigils in Hanoi and hold accountable police and others responsible for attacking Catholic parishioners, Human Rights Watch said. The protesters have been calling for the return of church properties confiscated by the government. Human Rights Watch also urged the government to end the harassment, threats, and restrictions on the movement of the Archbishop of Hanoi, Joseph Ngo Quang Kiet, who has publicly defended the rights of the Catholic protesters and visited the families of arrested parishioners. Vietnam has neither seen such large numbers of Catholics participating in public protests since the 1950s, nor has the government responded to Catholics so violently as it has in recent decades.

Vietnamese authorities recently used tear gas and electric batons to disband peaceful Catholic prayer vigils in Hanoi, and bulldozed properties considered sacred to Vietnamese Catholics. Hundreds of unidentified people, some in the blue shirts of the Communist Youth League, have harassed, cursed, and spit at parishioners and destroyed church statues. At least eight Catholic parishioners have been arrested for participating in the vigils since the latest round of protests began in mid-August.

- **Injured, 7 Missing In Vietnam Floods**

Four people were injured and seven were reported missing Sunday after heavy rains and flooding struck central Vietnam, officials said.

More than 20,000 homes were threatened by landslides in Thua Thien-Hue, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Quang Tri provinces and hundreds of dwellings had their roofs blown off in the storms, Viet Nam News reported Sunday.

- **Vietnam boosts investment in Laos' Savannakhet**

Vietnam has been increasing its investment in the Lao central province of Savannakhet, which shares borderline with Vietnam.

With the Sava-Seno special economic zone along the East-West Economic Corridor, the province has attracted more investment projects from Vietnam. According to the provincial Planning and Investment Department, Vietnam ranks third in terms of foreign investment projects in the province.

Vietnam’s investment is part of the two governments’ cooperation agreement in education, human resource development, sustainable development, information-culture, trade, infrastructure, tourism and services.Vietnam’s investment in Savannakhet province has so far totaled 38 million USD, focusing on wood processing and electric fiber production projects

- **Vietnam suffers flash floods in mountain regions**

Flash floods from heavy rains in central Vietnam this month have killed at least seven people. Government sources have said three provinces, Thua Thien Hue, Quang Nam and Quang Ngai, have been especially hard hit, with tens of thousands of homes submerged under water by the weekend.

The Government's Flood and Storm Control Committee have warned of more flash floods and landslides and have ordered the evacuation of homes.

- **Vietnam cuts prime rate amid global turmoil**

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increase liquidity and cut lending rates." Vietnam, a major producer of manufactured goods such as garments and footwear and commodities including rice, coffee and seafood, could be hit hard by downturns in the United States, Europe and other export markets.

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It also said it would buy back more than 20 trillion dong (1.2 billion dollars) of compulsory bills it had sold in March to curb inflation, which last month slowed to 27.9 per cent from 28.3 per cent in August.

- **Hardsaifong flood victims receive aids**

The Public Health Service of Vientiane has donated relief aids worth 11 million kip to the Hardsaifong district, Vientiane; to help its flood victims. The package was handed over on Monday at the Administration Office of Hardsaifong district by the Head of Vientiane Public Health Service Dr Inlavanh Keobounphanh and the Chief of Hardsaifong district, Mr. Bounthong Phimmaseng.

The aid, including drinking water, soap, and alum, will be further distributed to 1,930 families of flood victims in eight villages in the district. On Tuesday the Vientiane Public Health Service also granted relief items totally worth 18 million kip to flood victims in Park Ngum district, Vientiane. The package was presented by Head of the Vientiane Public Health Service Dr Inlavanh Keobounphanh and received by Deputy Chief of Park Ngum Mr. Vongdeuane Bounyaseng.On the occasion Dr Inlavanh called the local people who suffer from flood in August to pay more attention to their sanitation activities.

Laos

Political front
Social Front

- Thailand, Laos Hmong Refugee Crisis

Thailand, Laos Hmong Refugee Crisis: Officials Demand Hmong Volunteer to Return to Killing Fields, Reeducation Camps

Royal Thai soldiers and Ministry of Interior officials (MOI) at Ban Huay Nam Khao, Petchabun Province, Thailand havetold Hmong refugees that if no one volunteers to return to Laos in the current month of October, then the military will again begin forcingthe Hmong political refugees back to Laos.

Thai solders have announced that next month, November, 2008, the next Hmongrefugees to be forced back to Laos, will be those Hmong who took partin the 'march to freedom' earlier this year in protest against their threatened forced repatriation to the authoritarian military regime in Laos that they fled.

'Reliable sources in Thailand indicate that a major new effort and strategy appears to be underway by some renegade elements of the Thai Third Armyand Ministry of Interior to restart the forced repatriation of thousands of Hmong and Laotian political refugees to Laos over the next several months,' stated Philip Smith, Executive Director of the

Dr.Hamilton-Merritt is the author of the highly acclaimed book Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans and the Secret Wars for Laos(Indiana University Press). She was recently honored for her human rights and humanitarian work by the Hmong and Laotian community at events in Rhode Island and Wisconsin.

'These Hmong political refugees finally managed to get out of Laos and are now detained in Ban Huay Nam Khao; If they are return to Laos, they will be turned over to the LPDR military and security force authorities who sought to kill them for decades and who have killed and imprisoned hundreds of those recently forced back to Laos earlier this year,' Vaughn Vang continued.

'The Lao military continues its horrible attacks against Laotian and Hmong civilians and religious and political dissident groups hiding in the jungles and mountains who are being starved to death,' Vaughn Vang said.

- **Laos, Vietnam plan power line for hydro-electricity - *ADB***

Laos and Vietnam plan to build a cross-border power transmission line so Laos can sell hydro-electricity to its energy hungry neighbour, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said Friday.

Japan and the ADB will help develop a loan programme for the 240 million dollar project that includes an initial one million dollar grant from the Japan Special Fund, the Manila-based development agency added.

Landlocked Laos which hopes to become the "battery" of Southeast Asia's Mekong region by damming its rivers has about 18,000 megawatts (MW) in hydropower potential but has only tapped 663 MW so far, the ADB said.

Vietnam, which has enjoyed a decade of economic growth of 7.5 percent or more, is expected to see power demand rise by 16 percent a year until 2010, it said.

The 165-kilometre (102-mile) power line would link the Ban Sok substation in southeastern Laos with Pleiku in Vietnam's Central Highlands. The loans to Laos and Vietnam will be designed "to suit the commercial operation schedule of the 11 hydropower developers that will provide the 1,000 MW of electricity targeted for export," the bank said. The two countries have signed a sale agreement for up to 5,000 MW by 2020.

The ADB says Laos' hydropower export earnings to Vietnam, as well as Thailand, will "help fund projects that will bring electricity to rural areas, as well as social development and poverty reduction efforts."

- **Laos and Belgium to help disabled people**

(KPL) Lao Disabled People’s Association and the International Organization for Disabled People of Belgium to Laos signed a Memorandum of Understanding on capacity building for disabled people on 10 October.

Signatories to the MoU were Mr Bounvien Luang-nhot, President of Lao Disabled People's Association, and Mr Luc Deneuville, the Director of International Organization for Disabled People of Belgium to Laos.

According to the document the parties involved will spend 90,000 EUR on various activities to promote the capacity building of the disabled people in 45 villages during the next two years. The activities will be implemented in Vientiane, Vientiane province, Savannakhet, and Champassak.The project is also designed for promoting the rights of disabled people and improving their living condition.

Cambodia

- **Top commanders will hold talks Thursday in Siem Reap**

Mourner places incense sticks at a memorial ceremony in Phnom Penh Tuesday for the three Cambodian soldiers who died in last week's fighting on the border.

CAMBODIAN military commanders who will meet their Thai counterparts Thursday for high level talks on the border crisis have said that only increased dialogue will prevent a repeat of last week's deadly violence, as mourners in Phnom Penh commemorated the three troopers who died because of the fighting.

The two countries have been engaged in a standoff over disputed border territory since mid-July and, despite pledges not to inflame the situation, continue to reinforce their lines with more troops and weapons. Tensions flared in July after Preah Vihear temple, which is claimed by some Thais, was listed as a UNESCO world monument.

- **No more border clashes, Rais says**

Violence is unlikely to erupt again along Thailand and Cambodia's disputed border after Southeast Asian leaders appealed for peace, Malaysia said Tuesday.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Rais Yatim said Thailand would avoid further conflict, as it was due to chair the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations." The message

(to stop violence) has been transmitted to them," Rais told reporters ahead of his meeting with Thai Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat in Bangkok on Wednesday.

Malaysia will dispatch Rais to Phnom Penh to meet Prime Minister Hun Sen with a special message from Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for the two countries to avoid military confrontation and restart peace talks.

He said Malaysia hoped the two countries would restart their peace talks quickly and Monday warned that the conflict could embarrass Asean, which describes itself as a harmonious grouping. Three Cambodian soldiers and a Thai trooper died as a result of the October 15 shootout near Preah Vihear.

- **Cambodia, Thailand start annual regional border meeting**

Officials of the regional border committees of Cambodia and Thailand on Thursday held their annual meeting to solve bilateral differences and seek for development over border issues.

Thursday's agenda includes talks on trade, security, economy and social order along the border, said Siem Reap governor Sou Pheasin. "Tomorrow we will talk about overall issues," he added. Meanwhile, Neang Phat, secretary of state at the Cambodian National Defense Ministry, told reporters that it is the 11th annual meeting for both committees and will last two days.

Just on Oct. 15, a gunfire exchange occurred at the border between Cambodia and Thailand, killing two Cambodians soldiers and wounding over a dozen Thais.

In early October, at least one Cambodian soldier and two Thai troopers were wounded during sporadic fighting and two other Thai soldiers seriously injured after stepping on a landmine at the border area.

In effect, a military stalemate had haunted the region, and up to 1,000 Cambodian and Thai troops faced off there for several weeks.

- **Cambodia recruiting militias on border with Thailand**

Cambodian provincial and military officials said they are recruiting militias along the border with Thailand to protect frontier villages if hostilities erupt again amid a territory dispute between the two countries, national media reported Thursday.

Some 2,400 Cambodians have already volunteered to serve in the paramilitary units in Oddar Meanchey province alone, Deputy Governor Loun An was quoted by the Phnom Penh Post as saying. "We are in the process of recruiting people for militias to protect homes and ensure security for people if there is a war with Thai soldiers," Loun An said.

"Militia members receive no salary and do not register with the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), although they will get some sponsorship money," he added. The Cambodian government has called for calm following last week's border clash that has resulted in the deaths of three Cambodian soldiers and a Thai trooper.

The tension later turned into a military stalemate, in which up to 1,000 Cambodian and Thai troops faced off for six weeks.

In early October, at least one Cambodian soldier and two Thai troops were wounded during sporadic exchange of gunfire and two other Thai soldiers were seriously injured after stepping on a landmine at the border area, the report said.

- **Cambodia vows to improve defence**

Cambodia's premier vowed Friday to improve the country's defence capabilities, but insisted there would be no war with Thailand after a deadly firefight erupted on their disputed border.

The two sides have agreed to a joint border patrol aimed at preventing a repeat of Wednesday's clashes which killed two Cambodian soldiers near the ancient Preah Vihear temple, but there was no word on when they would start. Prime Minister Hun Sen said that talks remained the best solution to the dispute over land around Preah Vihear, a UN World Heritage site on Cambodian territory and the focus of months of tensions. "There will be no large-scale armed conflict because the two countries can still be patient," Hun Sen told reporters after meeting his cabinet.

“Today our cabinet, with the pride we received from protecting our territory, will discuss draft laws (to put the) national defence sector on top (of the agenda),” Hun Sen said, without elaborating on specific steps. While Thailand has a 300,000-strong armed forces and a well-equipped air force, Cambodia’s much smaller military is badly equipped, badly trained and disorganised, according to a Western military official in Bangkok. Many of their Cold War-era weapons misfired during this week’s shooting, soldiers along the border said.Mediation: Hun Sen also rejected the help of mediators - a U-turn from Cambodia’s position earlier this year when officials spoke about bringing the land dispute to the United Nations Security Council. “I think that it is not time yet (for mediated talks) because Cambodia and Thailand agreed to resume negotiations within existing mechanisms,” Hun Sen told reporters

Social Front

- **Refugees and asylum-seekers will now have their cases reviewed by the Department of Immigration, but the UN is not completely out of the loop**

Montagnards protest the deportation of 28 ethnic minority asylum-seekers outside the Phnom Penh UNHCR office in July. FOREIGN asylum-seekers in Cambodia will now have their cases heard at the Department of Immigration rather than the UN High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) office, according to a press release Monday.

The UNHCR office has been the port of call for refugees in Cambodia for the last 14 years, serving the needs of a small number of people, mainly persecuted Montagnards from Vietnam's Central Highlands who have been forced to flee their homelands.

According to the press release, the decision on whether to grant refugee status to individuals still rests with UNHCR officers, but will be done in stricter consultation with Cambodian officials, with the goal of eventually handing over authority entirely.

Toshi Kawauchi, protection officer at the UNHCR office in Phnom Penh, told the Post Tuesday that he saw the move as a positive step, symbolizing Cambodia's growing responsibility in the area of refugee rights. According to the UNHCR, only around 300

Montagnards have been granted refugee or asylum-seeker status and remain in Cambodia.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

South Asia

Ghashia Kayani

Weekly Report: from 18 October to 24 October 2008

Presentation: 29 October 2008

BANGLADESH:

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- Professionals at roundtable Country will plunge in deep crisis if Dec 18 polls
- US will send 120 observers to monitor elections deferred
- BNP won't contest polls under emergency
- BNP applies for registration with revised constitution

SOCIAL:

- Committee formed to decide on contaminated powdered milkPanic among mothers
- Police to get Tk 16.68 cr to speed up investigation
- Blood banks operate illegally with infected blood in capital
- Sack panic" grips garments workers across country

ECONOMIC:

- Govt warned against leasing out gas fields to foreign cos
- WB, IMF won't cut aid due to global financial crisis: Salehuddin BB to give careful consideration to forex rate
- RMG to face disaster without counter step against global economic crisis
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- **Fuel prices to be reduced upto 12 pc this week**

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- **European Commission expects emergency lifting or relaxation**

Professionals at roundtable Country will plunge in deep crisis if Dec 18 polls deferred

Leaders of civil society, professionals and political parties have observed that if the national election lined up for the December 18 is not ensured on time, the whole country would plunge in deep crises. Stressing on the need for permanent release of AL President Sheikh Hasina, lifting of emergency rule and settlement of all contentious issues between the government and political parties, they said, "Countrymen are eagerly waiting for the forthcoming parliamentary election through which they would be able to elect their representatives. Considering the people's demands, the Caretaker Government and political parties should reach a consensus to restore democracy across the country."They accused the incumbent government of showing a discriminatory attitude on Sheikh Hasina keeping her behind bars and said, "The government must realise that whole election process is closely connected with the release of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia continues her political activities openly where Sheikh Hasina was freed on parole for her overseas treatment only."Leaders of professionals alleged that the government is following a filtering mechanism through delaying tactic so that people would forget all misdeeds and misrule of the erstwhile BNP-Jamaat

Government.They were addressing a roundtable on 'National Election 2008: Apprehension and Possibility' orgnaised by 'Professionals' Coordination Council (PCC), Bangladesh at the National Press Club on Tuesday. Chaired by the Convener of the council Professor Quazi Faruque Ahmed, Dr Quamrul Hasan Khan presented the key-note paper in the roundtable conference.

US will send 120 observers to monitor elections

The US government will send 120 observers for monitoring the ensuing parliamentary election scheduled to be held on December 18, said a Foreign Ministry press release. After a meeting with US Ambassador James F. Moriarty, Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury told reporters at his office. He received the US envoy at his office and discussed the total gamut of Bangladesh-US relations which he said "continued to be strategic" We also talked about the current state of preparations for the upcoming elections on 18 December, a process to which the US is according full support", Iftekhar remarked to the press: "he informed me that the US will be sending 120 observers", he further stated.The Foreign Adviser reportedly expressed happiness over the continuation of GSP facilities by the US to Bangladesh and over the fact that last year over US $3.27 billion worth of RMG has been exported to US markets: "I hope necessary enabling legislation will take place in the US to encourage this trend", he said.

Sack panic" grips garments workers across country

Panic has started gripping the garments workers throughout the country as the owners are retrenching workers from their respective industries and factories indiscriminately. At least 15 workers from our factory were retrenched and we have come to know that more workers will be sacked. When we raise our voice to increase salaries, pay our eid-bonus and arrear bill, the industry owners become furious and issues us threat in many ways. And at one stage they start retrenching us. Now we are panicked as we don't know whether we will be able to continue our job here or not. It is very difficult for us to engage our minds in profession as we don't have any job security," talking to this correspondent Helena Sultana (30), a worker of New Aich garments at Farm gate said.Bangladesh Garment Workers Unity Council Coordinator Salahuddin Sawpan told The Bangladesh Today that hundreds of workers from some 50 garments have already been sacked in the last ten days. The garments from where the workers are being sacked are Tejgaon Sun Shine Garments, Gazipur GMS Composite, Sinha Fashion Limited, Shawrapara JK Fashion, Mirpur Creative Sweater Limited, Savar Garments Limited, Lovely Garments Limited, Rupayan Sweater Limited and Topaz Dress Limited.

Govt warned against leasing out gas fields to foreign cos

Political leaders and members of civil society have warned the government against its apparent move to hand over the country's natural resources to foreign companies, ignoring national interest.The warning was issued at a consultation on "Leasing out Gas Fields in the sea and Draft Coal Policy: National Interest" organized by the Weekly Bangladesh Shaptahik at the National Press Club.As a caretaker government, its main responsibility is to immediately hold the next election in a free, fair and neutral manner and to hand over power to the elected government soon after the polls. It can never take any decision regarding such a sensitive issue like giving the country's natural resources to multi-national companies, speaker's observed. Terming the caretaker government initiative to lease the gas fields out to the international companies hurriedly before holding the forthcoming parliamentary elections is mysterious, they said. It has prepared the so-called 'Model PSC (production and share contract) 2008' secretly, allowing the foreign gas and oil exploration companies to export minimum 80 percent of gas abroad from Bangladesh by changing it into liquid natural gas (LNG).All-out efforts are going on in full swing to sign contracts with the foreign companies to lease the nine blocks of gas in the Bay of Bengal out to them before assumption of power by the next elected government, they said.They alleged that on the plea of solving the country's gas crisis, the Special Assistant to the Chief Adviser for Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources Division and Power Division M Tamim made a unilateral arrangement for third round of bidding to lease out the fifteen gas blocks to foreign companies under the 'controversial' Model PSC-2008. In response to the bidding, six international companies submitted bid documents to take lease on 15 fifteen blocks in the Bay of Bengal. Later on, the Ministry of Energy made a recommendation to the Chief Adviser for leasing the eight block named block no. 10, block no. 11, block no.12, block no.15, block no.16, block no.17, block no. 20 and block no. 21 out of the 15 gas blocks, to the US oil company Conoco Philips and block no. 15 to the Irish company Tallo. All activities have been done very rapidly and secretly by avoiding the Advisory Council and Advisory Committee for Purchase to pave the way for handing over the country's gas fields to the oil companies from other countries as soon as possible.

WB, IMF won't cut aid due to global financial crisis: Salehuddin BB to give careful consideration to forex rate

Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Salehuddin Ahmed said multilateral donors like the World Bank and IMF would not cut their assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the global financial crisis.They won't cut aid from their commitment, rather they would try to increase it, if possible," he told reporters on arrival at Zia International Airport this morning, after attending the World Bank IMF Annual Meetings in Washington D.C. during Oct 11-13. Local economists and business leaders were apprehending that the flow of foreign assistance would slow down as the fallout of the global financial meltdown. On the sidelines of the Annual Meetings, the

Governor rang the alarm bell at an international roundtable on "the Impact of Financial Crisis in South Asia" that a slowdown in ODA and bilateral fund flow would mount pressure on the government budget in Bangladesh. It would result in affecting the ongoing poverty alleviation, social safety net, health and education programmes, he added. Replying to a question, Dr Saleuddin said the central bank would give a careful consideration to the foreign exchange rate as the Taka remained stable for quite a long time. Local manufacturers and exporters already expressed concern over the possibility of losing competitiveness to other countries, as their respective currencies depreciated against the dollar due to the crisis.

BGMEA urges govt to introduce 'double exchange rate' for continuing export

In the wake of US dollar devaluation in the international market, BGMEA urged the government to introduce 'double exchange rate' in the country in order to continue their business.We are requesting the government to introduce 'double exchange rate' where value of taka against dollar will be reduced for the exporters and the value of taka will remain unchanged for the importers," talking to The Bangladesh Today. BGMEA President Anwar ul Alam Chowdhury Parvez said.He urged the government to revaluate the taka from 68 taka to 71 as the present value of taka against a dollar is 68. "While India and Pakistan are devaluating the price of US dollar for increasing their export, Bangladesh is valuating its local currency. It will have a bad impact on our export and business. India has reduced the value of its rupee by 11 per cent and Pakistan has reduced 29 per cent for promoting their exports. But in this contest Bangladesh has been following the opposite policy. If the government does not consider our proposals, it will be very tough for us to compete in the global market," BGMEA President said.

BNP won't contest polls under emergency

BNP would not participate in any election if state of emergency is not withdrawn completely soon, before holding of parliamentary election scheduled to be held on December 18.We will not take part in any election while emergency is in place. If the government wants to hold election under state of emergency, the election would not be free, fair and credible. We are again asking the government to lift the emergency completely as early as possible to create an atmosphere where political parties can easily conduct their activities," BNP Secretary General Khandoker Delwar Hossain told reporters after a two hour long meeting with a five member UN delegation for Political Affairs on South Asia and Asia and Pacific region held at BNP Nayapaltan Central party office.

RMG to face disaster without counter step against global economic crisis: BKMEA

If the present global economic crisis continues and Bangladesh government does not take any

effective measures to find out ways and means, country's RMG sector will have to face a serious disaster, said BKMEA President Fazlul Hoque at a press conference held at his office.Government should take immediate steps to protect this sector and discuss with garments industry and factory owners. I think the government does not take this issue seriously. But considering the contribution of the vital sector, government will have to come forward and take effective measures to continue our business. Otherwise, this sector will be ruined," he said.He said government will have to give up the trend of sudden increase of fuel, gas and electricity. If the government wants to increase the price of fuel, gas and power, it will have to inform the RMG sector before six months. Simultaneously, government's step to increase further price of oil, gas and power should be stopped for six months. If the government increases the price of gas, power and fuel suddenly, it will very difficult for us to adjust the production costs and its selling price," BKMEA President said.

Blood banks operate illegally with infected blood in capital

A good number of blood banks are now being operated illegally around the city's government and private hospitals and clinics under the very nose of authority concerned."We are very much concerned and worried over the mushroom growth of illegal blood banks where various diseases infected and addicts donate their blood. And this blood is being injected to critical patients. Even these blood banks don't have any modern equipment to detect blood group. As a result, when this type of blood is injected to a patient, it may cause death to him. A group of organised dishonest people in association with the employees of concerned hospitals and clinics ask the relatives of patients to go to their blood banks for getting pure blood. Then the helpless people are compelled to purchase blood from them," Mohammad Hossain Anwar, Medical Director of AL-Razi Hospital told this correspondent on Saturday. The relatives of critical patients are buying this blood from these banks due to lack of awareness on voluntary blood donation. On the other hand, a good number of illegal blood banks are being operated without permission from the concerned authority in the capital since long. Most of the blood banks have no necessary instrument to screen blood for testing Hepatitis B and C, malaria, HIV and different types of sexually transmitted diseases, he added.

Police to get Tk 16.68 cr to speed up investigation

The government has allocated Tk 16.68 crore to the police to meet the expenses to expedite crime investigation to bring the accused to trials quickly and improve law and order, home ministry sources said.The allocation is meant to meet investigation officers' expenses for investigating crimes, quicker objective and impartial investigation, they said. The reforms and welfare steps taken by the caretaker government for the police, highly placed home ministry

sources told BSS, started giving positive results.The police budget for the current fiscal has been increased to 2,828.69 crore up from 1,905 crore 99 lakh and 74 thousand for fiscal 2006-07, they said.

Committee formed to decide on contaminated powdered milkPanic among mothers

The government has formed a 12-member committee for taking a decision on the sale of eight brands of powdered milk which contain toxic melamine.
"We have formed a 12-member committee comprising officials of concerned ministry, BSTI, BCSIR, Atomic Energy Commission, Plazma, Health Ministry and Chemistry Department of Dhaka University for further test of the eight brands of powdered milk. The committee has been asked to submit the report within a week," after an interministrial meeting, Commerce Secretary told reporters at the Secretariat yesterday.However, three test reports conducted by BSTI, Chemistry and Plazma Department of Dhaka University failed to reach a consensus about their test reports. As a result, confusion has been created over the test report. The samples of the powdered milk will be tested at two laboratories at home and one abroad, the Commerce Secre-tary said, adding not only these contaminated milk but also all brands of powered milk will be tested in phases. Replying to a query, the Commerce Secretary said during the next seven days the consumers will decide whether they would consume these powdered milk or not. "As the committee will submit its report after a week, during this period what type of milk should be fed to their kids, it will depend on the parents. Right now, we will say nothing about it," the Commerce Secretary added.

BNP applies for registration with revised constitution

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Monday submitted application to the Election Commission for getting registered bringing some minor changes in its party constitution which was approved by party standing committee meeting held on Sunday night. Besides, revising its name and party constitution, Jamaat-e-Islami, a component of BNP led four-party alliance also yesterday applied to the EC for registration, a precondition for participating in the upcoming elections scheduled to be held on December 18.BNP Joint Secretary General Nazrul Islam Khan submitted the application to the EC deputy secretary Jesmin Tuli .After submission of the registration form, Nazrul Islam said the party has been forced to be registered with the EC to keep the existence of the party. "We thought that some quarters had been trying to hatch a conspiracy to keep BNP out of the election. In spite of not meeting our demands, considering the country's interest, we have decided to get registered with the commission. We cannot allow anybody to take the opportunity of keeping us away of the poll.""BNP's constitution is very democratic. As per the amended constitution, from now on ward, members of the standing committee and executive committee will be selected through council meetings. Earlier the party

chairperson had the power of empowering or sacking any body," Nazrul said responding to a query.Asked about curtailing power of party chairperson, the BNP leader told that as the amended RPO does not say anything about curtailing power of chairperson, so the party did not bring any changes in this regard.The council has the power to amend the constitution, but we were forced to amend our constitution by a standing committee meeting which is really undemocratic." Nazrul added.

Fuel prices to be reduced upto 12 pc this week

Fuel prices will be reduced within next seven days, Special Assistant to the Chief Advisor for Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources Division M. Tamim .While briefing newsmen at the secretariat yesterday morning, M.Tamim said, the government has decided to decrease the prices of fuel in the local market as prices of the product have come down to large extent in the international market.In the wake significant reduction in prices of petroleum products in the global market, the government has made the decision to decrease the price of the products by 8 percent to 12 percent, he said.A proposal has already been prepared in this regard and it will be sent to the Chief Adviser for his approval in the next two days, Tamim mentioned.

European Commission expects emergency lifting or relaxation

The European Commission expects an announcement from the caretaker government soon about lifting or relaxing the state of emergency as a 10-member core group from Brussels comes here on November 6 to assess the pre-poll situation."Our position has not changed. The teams that are coming will talk to as many people as possible, including press, political parties and election officials, to assess the political situation and report back to Brussels whether or not a full-fledged observation mission will come," EC Ambassador Dr Stefan Frowein.He said this is important for Brussels, the EC headquarters, to take the right decision as to whether or not they will send full observation mission to Bangladesh to monitor the December 18 parliamentary polls. Frowein made the remarks to reporters after a meeting with Foreign Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury at the Foreign Ministry when they also discussed other things like Bangladesh-EU trade.

SRILANKA

POLITICAL:

- **Sri Lanka Foreign Minister urges Lankan expatriate in Australia to unite to build a prosperous nation**
- **Govt responsible for the welfare of every citizen**
- **Sea Tiger suicide squad attacked merchants ships with humanitarian aid to Tamil people of Jaffna Peninsula**
- **LTTE should lay down their arms and come forward for negotiation with Sri Lanka Government**

SOCIAL:

- **First ever international fisheries exhibition**

ECONOMIC:

- **Food prices in Sri Lanka unprecedented for the last two years**
- **Sri Lankan Tea Exporters to target 1000 MT exports to China 2008**

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- **Sri Lanka will not submit to any investigation to obtain GSP Plus concessions**
- **Sri Lanka to send its delegation to India on 26 October**

Sri Lankan Tea Exporters to target 1000 MT exports to China 2008

Sri Lanka participated at the Beijing China Tea Expo held from 12 -15 October at the China World Exhibition Center, promoting Ceylon Tea at a very high profile and the biggest tea show in China. Center stage was captured by Sri Lanka and Ambassador Karunatilaka Amunugam was interviewed by the organizers, where he explained in detail the fine quality of Sri Lanka Black Tea and the potentiality it has for securing a bigger share in the Chinese market.

First ever international fisheries exhibition

The organizing of the International Fisheries Expo Sri Lanka 2008 (IFESL-2008) International Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Exhibition – is another first of its kind by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka (FCCISL) in partnership with the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources. This fisheries exhibition will be held at the Sri Lanka Exhibition

and Conventional Centre from 7th to 9th November.

LTTE should lay down their arms and come forward for negotiation with Sri Lanka Government - Lord Naseby

Lord Naseby , senior member of the House of Lords said that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) should immediately lay down arms and start negotiations with the government without causing further bloodshed. He made this statement to this correspondent after visiting a photo exhibition organized by the Sri Lankans Against Terrorism with the help of the Presidential Media Unit and the Sri Lanka High Commission in London. He said, "My message to them is there is nothing to fight; seeking peace is the most wanted thing for all the people in Sri Lanka at the moment.. So, lay down your arms and go to peace negotiations with the Sri Lanka government."

Sea Tiger suicide squad attacked merchants ships with humanitarian aid to Tamil people of Jaffna Peninsula

Reports revealed that Sri Lanka Navy has foiled an LTTE suicide attempt on two merchant ships, " M.V. Nimalawa" and "M.V. Ruhunu" carrying humanitarian assistance to the North, in the Northern seas around 5.10 today morning. The ships loaded with humanitarian assistance from Colombo to the Tamil civilians in the Jaffna peninsula were anchored in the Kankesanthurai sea region. Both vessels with essential food items were awaiting unloading at the time, one of the three Sea Tiger suicide boats after reaching close to the merchant ship, M.V. Nimalawa blew itself up. A considerable damage was caused to the ship's hull.

Sri Lanka to send its delegation to India on 26 October

Sri Lanka Government has called its High Commissioner in New Delhi and the Deputy High Commissioner in Chennai for consultation, prior to sending a delegation to meet the External Affairs Minister of India and high ranking Government officials to brief the situation in Sri Lanka. "Asian Tribune" learns that Sri Lanka President has decided to send a delegation to New Delhi to explain the ongoing war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as well internally displaced people in the Vanni region who have been held as human shield by the LTTE.

Food prices in Sri Lanka unprecedented for the last two years

While there is research data that more than 50 percent of the Sri Lankan population do not get the required minimum calories in their diets, on behalf of the Campaign for People's Solutions to Food Crisis (CPSF) Movement for Land and Agricultural Reforms (MONLAR) has carried out a signature campaign on 16th October to coincide with the World Food Day in front of the Colombo Fort Railway Station. The Signed Petition would be submitted to the Government.

Govt responsible for the welfare of every citizen - President

Indian Prime Minister in a telephone conversation with Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse expressed deep concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the North of Sri Lanka, especially of the plight of the civilians caught in the hostilities. A press release by the Indian Prime Minister's office after the telephone conversation with Sri Lanka President Mahinda

Rajapakese revealed that Indian Prime Minister has reiterated that the safety and the security of these civilians must be safeguarded at all costs. The Prime Minister also said that, in order to address the humanitarian situation, continued and uninterrupted relief supplies be ensured for the Internally Displaced Persons.

Sri Lanka Foreign Minister urges Lankan expatriate in Australia to unite to build a prosperous nation

Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama has underlined the fact that Sri Lanka was home to Tamils just as it was for Sinhalese, Moors and other ethnic groups and exhorted all Sri Lankans living in Australia to join together in building a prosperous Sri Lanka. He made this call during the course of his speech last Wednesday (15 October 2008) at the Sydney Centre for International Law (SCIL) of the University of Sydney on the theme ”From Terrorism to Democracy, Rule of Law and Development: Eastern Province of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka will not submit to any investigation to obtain GSP Plus concessions

Sri Lanka Government has informed the European Commission that it is not willing to submit itself to any form of investigation. In an urgent missive dispatched to European Commission yesterday, Sri Lanka Government has told very clearly that it will not submit itself to any form of investigations at the cost of country’s sovereignty to obtain GSP Plus concessions. Already in an interview with Asian Tribune Professor G.L.Peris, Minister of Export Development & International Trade said that Sri Lanka is naturally not happy at European Commission insistence to investigate some issues.

MALDIVES:

POLITICAL:

- President appoints Board Directors of MIFCO
- Majlis accepts Bill on Freedom of Assembly
- Reports on voting irregularities received – EC
- President inquires on the wellbeing of Maduvvaree people
- MDP Alliance opens 2 campaign offices in Male’
- Stabilty & harmony depends on free and fair elections –Shuagy

SOCIAL:

- Maldivian youth campaigning for DRP wants sincere reforms
- Errors not deliberate act to change text of Quran- DR
- Dhi TV signs agreement to telecast Majlis

ECONOMIC:

- MIFCO MD Adhil express support for MDP Alliance
- STO lowers fuel prices

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- President felicities leaders of Azerbaijan
- India praises free and peaceful presidential polls

Stabilty & harmony depends on free and fair elections –Shuagy

The country's stability and harmony is dependent on having an election where the level of freeness and fairness is acceptable to the people, former foreign minister Dr. Mahmoud Shaugy has said. Answering a question posed by Miadhu Daily Shaugy expressed that holding such a free and fair election is vital to ushering the social and economic development that is expected by the people. However he said many believe such an election is not possible. "I do not believe that peace and stability will prevail in the country, unless we hold an election where the people will be glad to accept the results due to the level of fairness and freeness of the elections, it's a pity that most people do not accept that such a free and fair election is possible in the country, so such an election will be an important step forward in ushering the social and economic developments expected by the people" Shaugy said referring to opposition candidate Mohamed Nasheed (Anni)'s comments on holding a free and fair elections in the middle of his presidential term after winning the presidential runoff slated for 28 October 2008.

India praises free and peaceful presidential polls

Indian External Affairs Minister Purnab Mukarjee on Thursday has praised the "free and peaceful" presidential polls held on Wednesday 8 October 2008, according to Asian News International (ANI). Puranab Mukarjee in a statement issued expressed that India was "heartened by the peaceful and fair manner in which the first round of multi-party presidential elections" was held. According to ANI the Indian Minister said "the fact of the election under the new Constitution, and the manner of their conduct, are tribute to the sagacity and foresight of President Gayoom who had led the Maldives in its steady progress towards democratization and all round social development."

MDP Alliance opens 2 campaign offices in Male'

Wathan Edhey Gothah (As the Nation Desires) campaign launched by the MDP Alliance to seek further increase support presidential candidate Mohamed Nasheed (Anni) has inaugurated two additional campaign offices in Male' on Friday night, according a statement issued by MDP campaign office. The inauguration of the two additional offices was followed by a special ceremony to renew and increase the campaigning spirit. The 2 offices opened on Friday night

are 'Gaamagu Campaign Office' located at H. Dhonannaaruge and 'Pink Campaign Office' located at M Vilufusheege. The campaign offices launching ceremony was attended by MDP Alliance presidential candidate Mohamed Nasheed (Anni) and leaders of seven opposition parties.

President felicities leaders of Azerbaijan

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has sent a message of congratulation to President Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev of Azerbaijan, following his re-election as the President of Azerbaijan for a second consecutive term. President Gayoom also sent a message of congratulations to Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, following his party's re-election to form a new Government. In two separate messages to President Aliyev and Prime Minister Harper, President Gayoom expressed his hope that the relations between the Maldives and the two countries would further strengthened in the years ahead.

President inquires on the wellbeing of Maduvvaree people

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has inquired about the wellbeing of the people of Maduvvaree Island of North Maalhosmadulu Atoll, as tidal surges caused flooding in the island. President Gayoom telephoned Mohamed Abdulla, a senior official of Raa atoll Office, this morning, and inquired about the conditions of the people and the actions being taken following the catastrophe. He also sought information about the work being done to evacuate the people in the affected areas to safer places.

Dhi TV signs agreement to telecast Majlis

People's Majlis Secretariat has signed an agreement with a private broadcaster Dhi TV. The agreement facilitates the Dhi TV the right to live telecast, record and utilize Majlis sessions. The agreement on behalf of the Majlis secretariat was signed by Deputy Secretary General of the People's Majlis Ali Shameem and on behalf of the Dhi TV by Chief Executive of the company Yousuf Nawaal. In addition Secretariat of the People's Majlis on 6 October signed agreements with radio stations Dhi FM 95.20 and Radio Atoll 96 FM to broadcast Majlis sessions.

Reports on voting irregularities received - EC

Interim Election Commission (EC) has revealed that the commission has received complaints that on Wednesday 8 October 2008, the day on which the first round of presidential elections was held, atoll chiefs, assistant atoll chiefs, senior officials of the atoll offices, island chiefs and civil servants of some atolls pressurized, intimidated and used their positions to influence the

decisions of the public in order to gain more votes for a certain candidate contesting the elections. A statement issued by the election commission said complaints are being received by the commission that said parties are exerting pressure and intimidating the public to vote for a certain candidate in the presidential runoff elections slated for 28 October 2008. “Under the General Electoral Rules and Presidential Elections Regulations, any act of intimidation or any act to exert pressure or influence to force the voting public to vote in a specific manner is illegal. Further vote buying, giving gifts or financial incentives to alter to influence the voter decision are also banned” the statement of the Election Commission signed the Deputy Commissioner Ahmed Shahid said.

STO lowers fuel prices

State Trading Organization (STO) has lowered fuel prices for the fourth time this month. Effective yesterday STO has lowered its prices of diesel, petrol and kerosene. In this regard a liter of diesel has been lowered from Rf.14.75 to Rf.14.25, while a liter of petrol was lowered from Rf 13.75 to Rf 13.50. A liter of kerosene was lowered to Rf.14.70. STO last reduced its fuel prices on last Tuesday when the company reduced Rf 1 from a liter of diesel and Rf.0.50 from a liter of petrol. Global fuel oil prices have dropped sharply in recent weeks. Prices were at a record high in July last year, although at present a barrel of crude now stands at US $69.

Errors not deliberate act to change text of Quran- DR

The errors in the new Dhivehi translation of the holy Quran complied by the President’s Office cannot be regarded as a deliberate act to change the text of the Quran, a religious scholar of Dhivehi Rahyithunge Party (DRP) Dr. Ahmed Abdulla has said. He made the statement speaking at the daily news briefing held at Maumoon 2008 campaign office yesterday. Abdulla Didi said, the translation of the Holy Quran in to Dhivehi language was undertaken by the government with very noble intentions. He said it is regrettable that the matter has been twisted by opposition for political purposes. He said the errors in the Dhivehi translation were not deliberate act to alter the meaning of the Holy Quran and despite the errors the meaning is clear and intact. He further said there was nothing wrong with the translation. Responding to Adhaalath Party’s (AP) leader Sheikh Hussain Rasheed Ahmed remarks that new Dhivehi translation of the Quran complied by President’s office should not be taken in to homes, Sheikh Moosa Nizar , key member of DRP at the media briefing said, the government has come up with plans to correct the minor errors contained in the translation and despite the errors the translation can be used by the people and that it is quite acceptable. Sheikh Moosa Nizar went on to say that Adhaalath Party (AP) leader at various forums has declared things that are not declared ‘haraam’ (forbidden) in Islam as haraam. He said on two occasions Shiekh Rasheed has said that voting for Gayoom is haraam and that such a fatwa is against the principles of Islam. Moosa Nizar also called on the Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs to take action against AP leader for his abuse of Islamic religion.

Majlis accepts Bill on Freedom of Assembly

The People's Majlis at its fifth sitting of the third session held yesterday morning has accepted the bill on Freedom of Assembly and passed to send the bill to the Committee on Public Affairs. During the plenary debate of the bill, thirteen members took the floor. After which the bill was put to vote to ascertain whether it be accepted or rejected by the Majlis. 11 out of 22 members in attendance voted in favor of accepting the bill. 10 members voted against while one member abstained. After the bill was accepted, the Speaker announced the committee stage of the bill. The Bill was ruled to be sent to the Majlis standing committee on Public Affairs, as this was the only proposal, submitted during this stage. This proposal was by submitted by Thaa atoll MP Mohamed Shareef and seconded by Male' MP Ibrahim Ismail.

MIFCO MD Adhil express support for MDP Alliance

Managing Director of the state owned Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company (MIFCO) Adhil Saleem and top officials of the company have expressed support for the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) led opposition Alliance. At a news conference held on Monday at press room Fansavees / Dharubaaruge , Adhil said that he and his colleagues has decided to support the cause of MDP Alliance because they believed that the present government was incapable of any meaningful reform. And that the country's deteriorating economic status will not improve with incumbent government in power. Adhil said Maldives fisheries industry is not developing as it should because of lack of government support and attention. Adhil further revealed that fisher folks across the nation, with whom he had the pleasure of consulting on various issues, have expressed the need for change and reform. He said many fisher folks has come to their senses, especially after seeing the election results of first round of voting, and are expressing their support for change. Adhil revealed that he had consulted the top officials of the MIFCO managements and that most of them have agreed that to be idle and ignore the call for democratic reform is not responsible.

President appoints Board Directors of MIFCO

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has appointed members to the Board of Directors to the Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company Limited (MIFCO). Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture and Marine Resources Mohamed Zuhair was appointed as the Chairman of the Board. Other members appointed to the Board are: Mohamed Shainee, Assistant Director General of the Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture and Marine Resources; Ali Riza, Deputy Managing Director of MIFCO;Adam Saleem, Assistant Managing Director of State Trading Organization; Mohamed Fizan ; Senior Engineer of Maldives Transport and Contracting Company Hussain Shiyam and Assistant Director General of Ministry of Finance and Treasury Fathimath Shifana.

Maldivian youth campaigning for DRP wants sincere reforms

Deputy media manager of Maumoon 2008 campaign Ali Waheed has stated that young men and

women engaged in DRP campaign activities are beloved citizens supporting 'sincere reforms'. Speaking at the daily news briefing of Maumoon 2008 campaign held yesterday, Ali Waheed referring to the anti campaign activities of the opposition said that these activities are prompted as opposition is certain that they will not be able to defeat DRP candidate Gayoom in the runoff elections. He also claimed that ongoing activities of 'Wathan Edhey Gothah' targeting DRP candidate are revealing signs of despair and defeat. Ali Waheed claimed that after winning the first round of elections by an over whelming majority, campaigning for the runoff had continued smoothly till now. However DRP campaign teams have faced considerable difficulties orchestrated by the opposition alliance. In this regard he noted that people wearing 'Wathan Edhey Gothah' T shirts caused unrests and violence when DRP candidate Gayoom returned Male' after campaigning in Addu atoll and Fuvahmulah. He said a person from the group wearing 'Wathan Edhey Gothah' T shirts threw a frozen bottle causing severe injuries to a middle aged woman who were at the scene to welcome Gayoom. He further said the matter is now under investigations and that Maldives Police was looking in to the matter.

NEPAL:

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- **CA prepares a schedule on constitution-making**
- **Four party meeting fails to reach agreement on special committee**
- **No agreement to integrate Maoist army into NA: Sitaula**
- **Disqualified combatants to be taken out from cantonments: Prabhakar**
- **TMLP calls off protest in House as PM assures of probe into Kapilvastu incident**
- **Koirala in Biratnagar to begin NC 'revival campaign'**

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- **ADB pledges Rs 8.3 billion grant aid**

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- **US, Chinese and Egyptian envoys call on Prime Minister**
- **Indo-Nepal trade treaty to be amended**
- **French help for flood victims in Nepal**

Koirala in Biratnagar to begin NC 'revival campaign'

Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala has arrived in his hometown Biratnagar Thursday for a 'party-revival campaign'.The NC announced the nationwide campaign to regain its base among voters after a the defeat in the Constituent Assembly election held early this year.Koirala will address the first mass gathering to be organised in Biratnagar Saturday. Other party leaders including Shekhar Koirala and Krishna Sitaula have already reached there to make necessary preparations for the mass meeting.The party further expects to harmonise the relation between the two factions in the party who came together before the elections. The leaders have admitted that the party could not be united at the lower level even as the two NC and NC (Democratic) reached the unification deal.

TMLP calls off protest in House as PM assures of probe into Kapilvastu incident

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has assured the leaders of the Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Party (TMLP) that an investigation committee will be formed to probe murder of the party's two cadres in Kapilvastu.TMLP leaders went to the PM's residence in Baluwatar Thursday morning to discuss the issue. The party had disrupted the parliamentary session briefly on Wednesday accusing the government of showing apathy towards the murder.According to TMLP leaders, the PM also assured of compensation to the families of the two persons gunned down by unidentified armed group.

Disqualified combatants to be taken out from cantonments: Prabhakar

Senior Maoist leader and Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Janardan Sharma Prabhakar has said that the PLA combatants who failed to be verified by the UNMIN will soon be taken out from the cantonments."The Maoist divisions will provide a draft plan to party leadership on how to rehabilitate the unverified combatants. They will then be rehabilitated accordingly," The Kantipur daily quotes sources as saying that the Maoists are preparing to settle this issue before the UN general secretary Ban-ki Moon arrives in Nepal.

No agreement to integrate Maoist army into NA: Sitaula

Former Home Minister and one of the chief peace negotiators Krishna Sitaula has said that there has been no agreement to integrate Maoist army into Nepali Army (NA).The then coordinator of the peace talks committee, Sitaula claimed that the peace accord does not clearly mention that the Maoist combatants will be integrated into NA.Speaking at an interaction in Biratnagar, Wednesday, Sitaula said, "There is no agreement that says that the guerrillas will be integrated into NA."He said that there were only verbal understandings that the Maoist combatants will be integrated into 'security organs'.

Relief distribution affected by false claims: Home Ministry

At a time when the government has been criticized for failing to address the grievances of flood and landslide victims with special relief packages, the Ministry of Home Affairs has said that the task of providing relief to flood victims in the eastern and western parts of the country has been hindered by difficulty in identifying the real victims.MoHA officials said that even landless squatters are coming to them claiming to be flood victims to get hold of the government's relief and rehabilitation package.Around 60,000 people were either displaced or affected by the Koshi floods that hit eastern parts of Nepal a month ago.Meanwhile, the Constituent Assembly meeting held in the capacity of Legislature-Parliament on Wednesday unanimously endorsed a seven-point resolution directing the government to take immediate initiative to provide relief for flood and landslide victims of eastern and western parts of the country.

Four party meeting fails to reach agreement on special committee

The meeting of the top leaders of the four parties – Maoists, Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) and Nepali Congress (NC) – failed to reach an agreement on the formation of special committee, which will be authorised to implement the process of army integration.They (the Maoists) said they will lead the committee. That is not acceptable to us," said NC vice president Ram Chandra Poudel.According to him, the Maoists cannot head the committee as it will be entrusted to carry out the process of integration of army including the Maoists' People's Liberation Army (PLA)."We have asked them to bring new proposal. Let's see what kind of proposal they bring," Poudel said.He said that NC feels either the committee should be headed on rotation basis by each major party or it should be headed by a party other than Maoists. He said that if the NC's proposal is rejected, the party will stay out of such committee.After NC made its position clear, the other three parties who are partners in ruling coalition are set to consult among themselves regarding the NC's stand.

Eight injured in Janakpur blast

At least eigt people have been injured in a bomb explosion at the Land Revenue Office in Janakpur.Three persons including one accountant of the office who were critically injured in the blast have been rushed to Janakpur Zonal Hospital for treatment. Two of them have been identified as Rajendra Mahato and Yogeshor Pandit.Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha led by Rajan Mukti has claimed responsibility for the blast.The explosion has taken place at a time when the government has invited the Terai rebels for talks.

ADB pledges Rs 8.3 billion grant aid

In a major aid package, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has pledged a programme grant of $106.3 million (approximately 8.33 billion rupees) to Nepal for promoting community development and improving local governance.A release issued by the ABD headquarters in Manila on Wednesday said the grant, which will be disbursed in three tranches, will support the active engagement of communities in local governance and improve resource management and service delivery by local government agencies. The grant will support the government's move to improve local service delivery through strong local bodies and engaged and strong community organizations," said Gambhir Bhatta, Senior Governance Specialist at the South Asia Department. "In the medium term, this is expected to bring good local governance, and ultimately, inclusive development."The programme will increase the involvement of women, as well as caste, ethnic, and minority groups in the local governance process, the ABD said.The programme will also undertake new ways of monitoring local finances by incorporating gender equality and social inclusion indicators; administering safety nets and social assistance programs to the poorest people; budgeting grants to education, health, and agriculture sectors; and testing coordination with other districts. The overall programme is estimated to cost USD 470 million, with the Nepal government contributing USD 260.8 million and the rest will come from other development partners, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (which will provide its support through a co-financing arrangement with ADB), United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the governments of Denmark and Norway, and several United Nations agencies.The first tranche of the ADB grant, not exceeding USD 20 million, will be disbursed upon grant effectiveness. The second tranche, not exceeding USD 45 million, will be disbursed upon finalisation of the joint financing arrangement between the Government and development partners and upon fulfillment of specific policy actions. The third tranche, not exceeding $41.3 million, will be disbursed within 12 months after the second tranche. Additionally, a follow-up ADB programme grant of USD 50 million is being considered for 2012 to 2015. The grant will focus on policy reforms such as business process reengineering to support a federal government structure, putting in place the legal framework for proper local governance, and strengthening the fiscal transfer process and system, the statement further said.

Indo-Nepal trade treaty to be amended

Officials of Nepal and India have agreed to amend the bilateral trade treaty within three months.This agreement was reached during the two-day Inter Governmental Committee (IGC) meeting between commerce secretaries of the two countries, reports Kantipur daily. The meeting ended, Monday, in New Delhi.There has been understanding on issues in which the two countries want change in the trade treaty," Purushottam Ojha, Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce and Supplies and head of Nepali delegation, told the daily.Ojha said that the changes will incorporate ways to further facilitate the bilateral trade and enhance Nepal's trading capacity.The next meeting will be held in Kathmandu in three months to give the final shape to the changes in the treaty.The Indo-Nepal Trade Treaty was signed in 1996. It has been renewed twice.

French help for flood victims in Nepal

More help is on the way for thousands of people struggling to recover from severe flooding in the east of Nepal.The Embassy of France in Nepal announced Tuesday that the French government is donating euros 500,000 (Rs. 50 million) to the UN World Food Programme (WFP) for its operation to assist those displaced as a result of the River Koshi bursting its banks nearly two months ago in displacement and damage to houses and crops.According to a joint statement issued by the Embassy of France and WFP, WFP is providing ration packs of rice, lentils, vegetable oil and salt to the needy districts of Sunsari, and Saptari"France's support comes at critical time. The Koshi flood is no longer in the headlines but people are still very much in need of help" WFP's Representative to Nepal, Richard Ragan saud. "It's easy for the victims of the Koshi flood to be forgotten but, until they can return to their homes and villages, they will need assistance. Ensuring that people have enough to eat is crucial to their welfare and recovery".

US provides Rs 3.3 billion in development aid to Nepal

United States has agreed to provide USD 42 million (approximately Rs 3.3 billion) to the government of Nepal for its development programmes.A press statement issued by the US embassy said an agreement on the assistance was signed on Sept 23 this year. The assistance will be provided through the US Agency for International Development (USAID). This funding is part of a total US development assistance package for Nepal of approximately USD 67 million for the year 2008, the embassy said. US assistance will support Nepal government's development priorities in health, economic growth, democracy and governance, and conflict mitigation sectors."This agreement is another demonstration of the US commitment to supporting development priorities in Nepal and we are very pleased to be working with the Government of Nepal," said USAID/Nepal Deputy Mission Director Anthony S. Chan. "This money will support programmes that directly benefit the Nepali people."Signed by Krishna Gyawali, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, and Beth S. Paige, USAID/Nepal Mission Director, the amendments will provide approximately $16 million to conflict mitigation, livelihoods and economic growth programmes that protect livelihoods of the poor, increase rural incomes through enhanced agricultural yields, and provide vocational training and targeted scholarships for disadvantaged youth.Similarly, USAID/Nepal will also provide USD 8 million to support democracy and governance programmes that strengthen the democratic electoral and political processes, support community level natural resource management, encourage and facilitate representation of women in politics, and combat trafficking and exploitation.

US, Chinese and Egyptian envoys call on Prime Minister

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal remained busy in diplomatic parleys on Tuesday. He held separate meetings with the ambassadors of the United States, China and

Egypt.PM Dahal first met US ambassador Nancy J. Powell at the PMO in Singha Durbar. The meeting was focused mainly on future US assistance to Nepal and the PM's recent visit to New York. During the meeting, the PM is also learnt to have reiterated the request to remove the terrorist tag on his party, CPN (Maoist).In New York, on the sidelines the United Nations general assembly, the PM had a brief meeting with US President George Bush and had a more detailed discussion with Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Richard Boucher.Meanwhile, Chinese ambassador Zheng Xianglin paid a courtesy call to PM Dahal before returning to Beijing after completing his term in Kathmandu.Similarly, Egypt's ambassador to Nepal Abdelhamid Mahmoud Soliman also called on Dahal and discussed areas of possible cooperation between the two countries, according to PMO sources

CA prepares a schedule on constitution-making

The Constituent Assembly (CA) secretariat has prepared a schedule on constitution-making with a view to complete the process on stipulated time, reports Kantipur daily.The schedule states that a new constitution will be promulgated in one and a half year's time.According to the daily, the CA chairman Subas Nemwang has said that the schedule will be made public once the CA rules are finalised.He said that it will be made public following deliberations with all the parties.Due to delay in formulation of the rules, the process of writing new constitution could not begin even six months after it was formed. The interim constitution stipulates that new constitution will be finalised in two years

BHUTAN

POLITICAL:

- **Parliament postponed**
- **Meeting MDG goals – The challenges before Bhutan**

SOCIAL:

- **Ugyentse faces water shortage**
- **Bhutan’s biggest party ever**
-

ECONOMIC:

- **50% and above for most, PM**
- **Fuel rates may drop**

GEO-STRATEGIC:

Bhutan's biggest party ever

With the historic coronation event only two weeks away, a festive ambience has begun to set in and the fever has crept beyond the capital to other districts in the country. Many schools and institutions ring with voices and rhythmic footsteps of students practising for the event. Men and women from villages travel to gewog centres and dzongkhags almost every day to perfect their performances.While government officials are engaged in arrangements for the celebrations, monasteries and religious institutions are drawing up programmes of prayers and offerings. Different organisations and individuals are making innovative contributions and gestures towards the celebration. While shops are coming out with khadars bearing the centenary logo, a non-profit organisation is making the biggest banner bearing messages for His Majesty. Thimphu, where major events will be held starting November 6, is gearing up with preparations in full swing.

Meeting MDG goals – The challenges before Bhutan

Although on track to achieve the millennium development goals' (MDGs) health targets, Bhutan is challenged with low levels of skilled birth attendance. "Bhutan's skilled birth attendance, which is 56 percent, is a critical challenge," said a WHO representative during the high-level consultation held in Ahmedabad, India, to accelerate progress towards achieving maternal and child health (MNCH) - goals 4 and 5 of the MDGs. Accounting for more than 1,74,000 maternal and 1.3 million neo-natal deaths every year, about 250 participants from 11 member countries had a mid-term review of MDG goals 4 and 5 from October 14 to 17. The delegates discussed and exchanged information on MNCH, focused mainly on the current situation, progress and barriers towards achieving MDGs 4 and 5, and came up with an accord on multi-sectoral actions for intensified efforts in improving MNCH in the SEAR countries. The MDGs focal person for health ministry, Ugyen Tenzin, said that the ministry would garner unstinted political commitment for policy support and resource allocation from bilateral and multilateral partners, man all district hospitals with a gynaecologist and equip all district hospitals with a minimum of two functional ambulances to provide a better skilled birth attendance in the country. "Low skilled birth attendance and limited access to emergency operation centre services have been a challenge to Bhutan, along with inadequate community, shortage of skilled health professionals

and quality of care and poor supervision, monitoring and follow up," he said. However, Ugyen Tenzin said that health ministry had allocated 11 percent of the health sector's budget in the 10th Plan to meet MDG goals, excluding overall health system expenses like human resource development and infrastructure. The ministry would be spending on strengthening reproductive health, capacity and facilities at all levels of service delivery. Meanwhile, health ministry's officiating chief human resource officer, Chimi Rinzin, said that the ministry is in need of 20 gynaecologists and 10 pediatricians immediately. There are six gynaecologists and three pediatricians in the country today. Chimi Rinzin said that the country would need 200 specialists, including gynaecologists and pediatricians, and over 1,000 nurses to make full use of the existing health facilities. The delegates also recommended WHO to assist countries in developing a case for investments in maternal and child health in terms of social and economic outcomes, accessing resources from donors and partners, and building human resources, among others.

Parliament postponed

The second session of Parliament, which was scheduled to commence on November 12, has been postponed until further notice.A spokesperson for the National Assembly Secretariat said that the parliament session was postponed because it coincided with the Coronation celebration of His Majesty the King. The dates will be announced later after consulting the Zakar, said the spokesperson.

Fuel rates may drop

The Wall Street financial meltdown which sent reverberations across the globe and resulted in a phenomenal crude oil prices slump has sent India mulling a cut in retail fuel prices.International crude oil prices tumbled more than 50% to a lowly US $ 71.14 a barrel on Friday from record highs of above $147 in July. The Indian petroleum minister, Murli Deora, told Thursday that a price cut would be considered if the price of crude oil imported by India falls to US $ 61 a barrel.Since Bhutan imports all its oil products from India, the price drop in India will be welcome news. Oil firms in India were supposed to break even on sale of petrol, diesel, LPG and kerosene if the price of the basket of crude India buys were to come down to US $ 67 a barrel. However, with 20% depreciation in value of rupee against the US dollar, the break-even point is now at US $ 61 a barrel. Bhutan experienced a price hike in fuel around June where the petrol price shot to Nu 47.45 from Nu 43 a liter. Diesel price increased to Nu 34.77 from Nu 31.97 a liter. The price of an LPG cylinder rose from Nu 373.58 to Nu 417.80. Since petrol and diesel top the chart of Bhutan's imports from India, a price cut will be a breather.In 2007, Bhutan imported diesel worth Nu 1,634.82 million and petrol worth Nu 630.88 million.Meanwhile, the 13-

member strong body of oil producing nations, OPEC, has already cut supply targets once, by about 500,000 barrels a day, to try to check the price drop.

Ugyentse faces water shortage

Water shortage is one of the major problems faced by the farmers of Ugyentse geog in Samtse, especially during the paddy cultivation. With no reliable water source, it has been a growing concern for years now.Farmers in Ugyentse geog in Samtse are completely dependent on the monsoon rains during the paddy transplantation season. When monsoon season ends, they are again left high and dry. The farmers are now looking for other options.Ap Tshering Tashi is a farmer from Tashiding village. He has a field measuring about one and half. In the past he grew only paddy on his field but now he has given up paddy cultivation altogether.He said there is simply not enough water to irrigate his land. For the last three years, he has been cultivating grass in his paddy fields and raising jersey cows. Currently he has seven jersey cows.He earns about Nu. 12,000 per month by selling dairy products. He said it is a profitable business. But Ap Kesang Dorji from Ngatshang village has been exploring other means to bring water in his three acre paddy field. The Ugyentse gup Sonam Norbu agreed that there is water shortage in the geog. Ugyentse geog has a total of 11 villages.

50% and above for most, PM

Calming the jitters of impending pay raise figures, the prime minister said the hike after all will be meaty.Lyonchen Jigmi Y. Thinley said the majority of the civil servants will get a 50% and more raise. The prime minister said the minimum proposed raise of 40% is “not a small amount.” He said only about 2,000 civil servants fall in the 40% category while the remaining majority will get 50% or more. There were 19,516 civil servants in the country as of June. This is where the pay hike proposal stands as of now after the finance ministry reviewed the proposal of the Pay Commission, the prime minister told the media on October 17. Lyonchen Jigmi Y. Thinley said the finance ministry has reviewed the Pay Commission’s proposal and submitted it to him the day before. The reviewed proposal will now be discussed in the cabinet following which it will be further deliberated by the parliament in November before the final decision is reached.The prime minister said the 2,000 civil servants who fall in the 40% category are those who do not require high qualification or investment in terms of training while discharging their daily responsibilities. He said this group can easily be replaced, and encouragement and special attractions in terms of incentive is not necessary. “They are the people whose skills and value to

public service is minimal."Lyonchen Jigmi Y. Thinley said if everyone got more than 40% raise then it would have a major impact on the private sector as well as the general labor market including the rural work force. The prime minister said the people will have enough time to study the proposal and give feedbacks which will contribute to the Parliament deliberations.

Myanmar

POLITICAL:

- USDA launches election campaign with charity work
- 66,000 people displaced by Myanmar army abuses: aid group

SOCIAL:

- Influential United States Teachers' Union Gives Major Award to Burma'sStudent Activists
- Child prisoners in Burmese concentration camp

ECONOMIC:

- Ban on rice export lifted
- Over 200 villagers forced to work in rubber plantation
- Farmers in Mon State hit hard by dropping rubber prices

GEO-STRATEGIC:

- Australia extends sanctions against Myanmar junta
- India wants to seal border with Myanmar after blast – Biswajyoti Das

66,000 people displaced by Myanmar army abuses: aid group

Up to 66,000 civilians have been forced to flee their homes in eastern Myanmar in the past year because of systematic abuses by the country's ruling military, an aid group. The Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC), which provides aid to hundreds of thousands of refugees who flee Myanmar, formally known as Burma, said in a new report that the junta's actions could constitute crimes against humanity. The extent of persecution and suffering in the border areas has been largely unseen and under-reported for decades," said Jack Dunford, TBBC's executive director." Yet the same brutal army that crushed protests on city streets last September marauds with impunity in rural Burma, bringing fear and disrupting the lives of villagers on a day to day basis.

USDA launches election campaign with charity work

An upbeat Burmese military junta sponsored Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) in Kachin State has recently launched a series of campaigns to kick start its preparations for the 2010 general elections announced by the regime before the

May referendum on the draft constitution, observers said.The preparations by the USDA revolve around several community works done by its members such as providing charity and offering free medical treatment to people, according to a resident in Myitkyina.The USDA is striving to attract the people's attention and make them aware of its existence. The USDA has put up a big billboard in front of monasteries which says that 'the charity is organized and held by USDA', a resident told KNG.In Myitkyina Township, Shanzu quarter, famous monasteries such as Wuntu Monastery and Ta-tanah-beik-manh have been targeted as pivotal places for their charity movement, a resident added.In the beginning of October the USDA organized free medical treatment for residents. The medical treatment package under the aegis of the USDA was one of their campaign strategies for the 2010 election to garner votes from the electorate. More such activities to woo voters are on the cards it seems, local observers added.

India wants to seal border with Myanmar after blast – Biswajyoti Das

India needs to seal its border with Myanmar to stop separatist rebels carrying out regular attacks in the northeast, officials said on Wednesday, a day after a powerful blast killed 17 people in Manipur state.Police said a bomb on a bicycle blew up in Imphal, the state capital, late on Tuesday. At least 40 people were wounded in the attack that police believe was revenge for security forces killing at least eight rebels last month.Police suspect the separatist People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) in Manipur, a state which has suffered separatist and tribal insurgencies for the past 60 years in the troubled northeast region.The rebels escaped across a largely unguarded border to their camps in neighbouring Myanmar, police said.Manipur shares a long porous border with Myanmar of around 370 km (230 miles) and security officials want the entire stretch to be barbed-wired to stop smuggling of weapons and explosives.Ringed by China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan, India's northeast is home to more than 200 tribes and has been racked by separatist revolts since India gained independence from Britain in 1947.

Child prisoners in Burmese concentration camp

About 10 child prisoners under the age of 18 are languishing in the Inntainglay concentration camp in Kalay Township, Sagaing Division in northwest Burma. They have been confined in the camp by the military junta authorities, according to prison sources.There are around 10 child prisoners, including two girls in Inntainglay concentration camp. I was only 17 years old when I was taken to the prison camp," said a prisoner from Chin state who was released from Inntainglay camp last month.Most of child prisoners in Inntainglay are being imprisoned for stealing, a prisoner from Chin state said.A former Chin prisoner also said that prison authorities had tried to persuade child prisoners in Inntainglay to join and serve in the Burmese Army. They refused."The camp authorities told them that they will be freed from prison if they serve in the army," a former Chin prisoner said.

Farmers in Mon State hit hard by dropping rubber prices

Rubber plantation owners, and their workers, are deeply concerned as rubber prices continue to drop, say sources in Mon State. Two months ago, rubber fetched 2,600 kyat per kilo ($2 USD). Prices have dropped, however, to just half that – 1,300 kyat per kilo.Mon State, Burma's largest rubber producer, is being hit particularly hard by the precipitous price drop. "The price of rubber is dropping almost everyday. Nobody buys it. We don't know what to do," a rubber plantation owner in Mudon Township told IMNA.If the rubber price keeps dropping like this, we will face the problem of how to survive," the plantation owner said.A former government servant in the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation echoed the sentiments of farmers, saying the price decreases will cause serious problems for farmers totally reliant on the sale of rubber. He also added that he did not know the reason for the price decrease, but surmised it to be related to world trade."We don't want to sell rubber for such a low price, but our boss said the price will keep going down because it is related to global markets," Nai Myo Win, a plantation worker from Mudon Township, told IMNA.Nai Myo Win is now a migrant worker in Thailand, and said that he is barely able to send money home to his family. In the past, he said that he could send hundreds of thousands of kyat to his parents. Rubber values in Thailand have dropped as well, from 100 to 40 baht per kilo.

Over 200 villagers forced to work in rubber plantation

The Burmese military junta authorities are forcing 200 villagers to work in a rubber plantation near Aung Mamgala modern village from October 20, said a villager who worked as a forced labour. The rubber plantation is around 3.40 acres and is controlled by Tactical Operations Command (TOC) in Buthidaung. The land was confiscated from the Rohingya community in the area.The villagers had cultivated rubber seedlings which the TOC sold to villagers at 250 Kyats per seedling three years ago.The authorities ordered the village headmen to send the workforce (which the junta calls to forced labour) to work in the rubber plantation. They are to fix fences, spread fertilizer and clean the grass around the rubber plants, said a village headman on condition of anonymity.

Australia extends sanctions against Myanmar junta

Australia extended financial sanctions against another 45 of Myanmar's military leaders Wednesday as a protest against the junta's lack of progress toward democracy.Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said the new list of 463 individuals singled out for sanctions included members of the ruling State Peace and Development Council, government ministers and military officers as well as the regime's business associates and relatives.It replaces a list of 418 people announced a year ago after the junta brutally crushed pro-democracy protests led by Buddhist monks in Myanmar, which is also known as Burma."This was, unfortunately, only the most recent very public instance of the brutal treatment meted out to civil society in that country and to those

seeking to make Burma a better society and a nation based on democratic norms and ideals," Smith told Parliament.

Influential United States Teachers' Union Gives Major Award to Burma's Student Activists

The American Federation of Teachers, the largest organization representing teachers and educational workers in the United States (with more than 1.4 million members) has awarded its "2008 President's International Democracy Award" to a leading Burma's pro-democracy group, the "88 Generation Students". The 88 Generation Students group is led by prominent Burmese democracy leader Min Ko Naing, who is locked up as a political prisoner in the Southeast Asian country of Burma. (The award certificate is attached.)The AFT announced the award at its national convention, held on July 12, 2008 in Chicago, Illinois. At the event, Democratic Presidential Candidate Senator Obama was a keynote speaker.Since Min Ko Naing and the other leaders of the 88 Generation Students are locked up as political prisoners in Burma, AFT has sent the award to the U.S. Campaign for Burma to keep until it can be delivered to the 88 Generation Students. USCB will proudly maintain the award."We are honored to keep this award on behalf of the 88 Generation Students", says Aung Din, executive director of the USCB and close friend of the '88 student leaders since Burma's 1988 popular democracy uprising. "This award recognizes the enormous courage and sacrifice of Burma's students in the struggle for democracy and human rights," he added.

Ban on rice export lifted

The Burmese military junta has lifted the ban on the export of rice after five months in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis lashing parts of Burma including the country's rice bowl – the Irrawaddy delta.Rice export has been permitted again as of early October, according to an official."Those who have the license can export rice after going through different stages. The decision, however, rests with the Trade Council authorities. There were restrictions earlier but now export of rice is being permitted again. Priority will be given to companies which were into land reclamation and grew rice on the new land stretches," an official of the Foreign Export Department told Mizzima on condition of anonymity.The Foreign Export Department is under the Ministry of Commerce and Economy which supervises rice exports.The regime imposed restrictions on export of rice after Cyclone Nargis devastated rice producing regions of Irrawaddy and Rangoon Divisions on May 2 and 3.Though the Trade Department official declined to give further details, export of rice is being allowed only after ensuring 'self-sufficiency in domestic consumption.Rice export permit seekers must apply within parameters of the scheme, an official from 'Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry' said.Yes, it has been two weeks. The companies can apply for rice export permits by mentioning the country it is being sent to and the buyer. Officials will come and inspect the goods once the permit is granted. They said they would grant permits to those who have a valid and sound background and can produce documents. No one has been given such permits yet," said a rice trader from Bayintnaung Brokerage market.The most popular Burmese rice in foreign markets is the 'Zeyar' and 'Eimahta' (with 25 per cent broken rice).

Business and Politics in Muslim World

India

Sadia Khanum

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Political front

BJP banking on Assembly elections

The BJP is banking on a good performance in the forthcoming state Assembly elections to propel it to power in the next Lok Sabha elections. Party leaders believe that a good showing in the Assembly polls, particularly in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Chattisgarh, would not only bring the BJP and its allies closer to power but also rally fence-sitters, small and new political parties behind it to make its task of capturing power in New Delhi easier. However, party insiders admitted that the BJP is in for a tough fight in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. A party central leader who did not want to be quoted noted the BSP’s emergence as a political force in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. He is of the view that the BSP would eat into the Congress vote bank in these states, indirectly helping the BJP. In the 2007 Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh the BSP through its now famous social engineering captured the BJP’s Brahmin and Baniya citadel, thus harming its chances. In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP feels the Uma Bharti-factor was unlikely to dent its chances in the coming Assembly polls. It feels the former BJP chief minister was likely to make some impact only in the Bundelkhand region.

Govt mulling ways to restore minorities’ confidence: PM

Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh said the government was looking into every possible way of restoring confidence of minorities in the wake of attacks on Christians in Orissa and Karnataka and the Jamia Nagar encounter here between suspected militants and police. The PM gave this assurance to a delegation of Muslim leaders of Congress and told them that he will take a decision soon on the important issue. According to former union minister Mr. Salman Khurshid who was a member of the delegation, the PM shared their concern over attempts to spoil the atmosphere in the country by certain vicious elements. The leaders also wanted that Congress should tighten its base wherever it is in power so as to ensure that the public confidence is restored. "PM expressed concern over the incidents and said that he would look seriously into every possible way to restore the confidence of the minorities and that he will take a decision soon on the issue," Mr. Khurshid said.

Cong, BJP welcome polls

Mainstream political parties Congress and BJP welcomed the Election Commission's decision to hold polls in Jammu and Kashmir while regional parties including National Conference gave a guarded response to the democratic process. BJP, which plans to seek benefit out of the recent land controversy of Amarnath shrine board, welcomed the decision of the EC saying the party was "sure that the decision would prove to be a milestone in democratic history of the country and the state of Jammu and Kashmir in specific". BJP President Mr Rajnath Singh said: "The coalition government of Congress and PDP failed to meet the expectation of the people of state. So we will get the benefit from their failures." Congress spokesperson Mr Shakil Ahmed said the party is "fully prepared for the elections and appeals to the people to vote without any fear". President of National Conference, the main regional party in the state, Mr Omar Abdullah reacted cautiously saying the polls may witness a low turnout but nevertheless the state will see an elected government. "The present dispensation was not able to address to people's problems," Mr Omar said, but added: "I still believe that you will have a less than adequate turnout in parts of the Valley. You may not see an enthusiastic elections as one could have seen, if the polls were held in March or April next year."

Hurriyat, JKLF boycott

The Hurriyat Conference and other separatist outfits today said they will boycott the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir which they termed as a "futile exercise".

Raj Thackeray a mental case: Lalu

Condemning the attack on railway board examination centres in suburban Mumbai by MNS activists, railway minister Mr Lalu Prasad (photograph right) demanded a ban on the outfit, saying its chief Mr Raj Thackeray was a "mental case". "I strongly condemn the incident. There should be an inquiry into the attack. There should be strong action against that party MNS should be banned," the minister told reporters here. His comments came as a response to the attack on 13 railway board examination centres in suburban Mumbai by MNS activists who protested "inadequate representation" to locals and chased away candidates from north India. Mr Prasad said the directions of the Supreme Court or any other courts did not have any impact on the MNS leader. "We can see such incidents when the elections are near," he said. The minister said he had spoken to Maharashtra chief minister Mr Vilasrao Deshmukh who assured him of a proper inquiry into the incident.

BJP rules out leadership change in Uttarakhand

The BJP ruled out change of leadership in Uttarakhand where 17 of its 36 MLAs have demanded removal of Chief Minister B C Khanduri and claimed a solution to the problem was being worked out. BJP spokesperson Sushma Swaraj told reporters that Khanduri would continue to be chief minister. "We don't want any change of leadership", she said. Swaraj claimed no resignations of the 17 party MLAs have been received by BJP president Rajnath Singh and "senior leader M Venkaiah Naidu and I are talking to the MLAs and we are moving towards a solution". Sources said Naidu invited the dissident MLAs, led by former Chief Minister Bhagat Singh Koshiyari, on Tuesday to have a discussion and address their grievances. Swaraj conceded that the MLAs did have some issues against Khanduri but claimed these were "minor and not of a serious nature". Party sources, however, said the 17 MLAs, including three ministers, had sent their resignations to Rajnath Singh yesterday. They had threatened to submit their resignations to Uttarakhand Assembly Speaker if their demands were not met. The dissidents are angry with Khanduri for what they allege is "arrogant and high-handed behaviour". The former army officer has been accused of being authoritative and inaccessible to MLAs and is reportedly not available even to some of his ministers.

No justice even 17 years after my father's killing: Rahul Gandhi

In the midst of the criticism faced by the UPA government over delay in hanging Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru, Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday injected a personal element lamenting he has not got "justice" even 17 years after his father Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. The remarks by the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family in an apparent reference to the non-execution of death sentence awarded to those convicted in the assassination of the former prime minister came when he blamed the "slow" pace of the country's legal system. "My father was a prime minister. My grand mother was also a prime minister, but I did not get justice. My father was killed by a bomb. Forty people were involved. It has taken 17 years, but still there has been no punishment," Gandhi told students of the H N Bahuguna University in this hill state. Gandhi's remarks came when a student asked him why death row convict Afzal Guru has not been hanged yet. "The issue is not why Afzal is not being hanged. Our legal system is very slow," said the Congress general secretary. He blamed the "slow" Indian legal system for that but said he had "full faith" in the judiciary and had no complaints about it. The Congress MP said he never complained why his father's killers were not hanged. "I believe in the legal system of the country. I will get justice but it will take time."

PM leaves for Japan, China

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh leaves on a two-nation tour of Japan and China. Dr Singh will be in Japan from 21-23 October for a bilateral visit and will travel to China from 23-24 October for the 7th ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Summit.

Domestic situation:

'Hindu fundamentalists behind riots'

The Kandhamal violence is not an ethnic conflict, it is clear case of facist attack by the Hindu fundamentalist forces, abetted by the trading community, who are the traditional supporters of the Sangh Parivar, said a study team led by Mr P Vara Vara Rao of Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Writers Association. Mr Rao, known for the role he played in the attempted peace talks between the Naxals and government, said: "It was shocking to note that even the administration was behaving on communal lines. The mindset of some people in charge of the relief camps in Kandhamal is despicable." "One such official at a relief camp told us that the inmates are here are getting free food and enjoying their stay and we are guarding them," he remarked to drive home his point. Rubbishing the ethnic violence theory touted by the state government, Mr Rao who was flanked by Mr Chalasani Prasad, Mr CSR Prasad and others, said that the victims belong to both the tribal and the SC communities. It is clear that both tribal Christians and SC Christians were targetted, he said. "Victims in large numbers have pointed towards Bajrang Dal, VHP and RSS," he alleged adding that the carnage was actually a continuation of the December 2007 attacks.

"The real culprits have not been arrested till date, the conspirators and kingpins have escaped while several innocents are behind bars," he charged. Mr Rao said that the situation is getting worse ~ those in relief camps are scared to return home and want CRPF deployment to continue while the tribals are revolting against indiscriminate arrests and want withdrawal of CPRF due to the kind of atrocities that have been committed. He appealed to both the SC and ST to fight against the forces that were trying to divide them on communal lines. Listing out his demands, he said: "The real conspirators and culprits should be arrested, government officials sensitized to behave in a secular and democratic manner with people and a thorough probe on activities of the Bajrang Dal, VHP, and RSS over the last five years must be conducted. Forceful conversion and re-conversion should be stopped." "Chief Minister Mr Naveen Patnaik says he is secular. We do not disbelieve him but he has his political compulsions and is in power with the help of the BJP and Sangh Parivar," remarked Mr Rao. "The police were silent when the mobs went about torching houses, committing murder and rape," he said. "Till date the state government has not enumerated the number of houses damaged. It has also failed to get a correct figure of the casualties that have taken place," he charged.

Shiv Sena warns of bigger movement in Maharashtra

Trying to score over Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), Shiv Sena warned of a "bigger movement" in Maharashtra if the government does not give preference to the locals in railway jobs. On a day when MNS chief Raj Thackeray was arrested in Mumbai, senior Shiv Sena leader Manohar Joshi said in the Rajya Sabha that the people in Maharashtra would not "tolerate" outsiders coming to the state."Outsiders will come (to Maharashtra). This will not go on," Joshi said sparking protests from Left and RJD members. "A bigger movement will be launched against the government," the former Lok Sabha Speaker said demanding that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh should give attention to the issue of the Maharashtrians being "denied" jobs in Railways.

Raj Thackeray to spend the night in jail: Govt lawyer

MNS chief Raj Thackeray, who was arrested in Ratnagiri in the early hours for attacks on north-Indians by his party workers in Mumbai, was granted bail by Bandra magistrate's court. After the magistrate remanded him to judicial custody till November 4, Raj's lawyer moved a bail application. The court granted him bail on furnishing a bond of Rs 15,000.Immediately after the bail, Raj was rushed to a court in Kalyan, where he will be produced in connection with a similar case of inciting violence. According to Special Public Prosecutor Majid Memon, Raj Thackeray will spend the night in jail.

Security beefed up in Mumbai to rein in MNS protests

Security was beefed up in the city to thwart any untoward incident following MNS chief Raj Thackeray's arrest in Ratnagiri. Around 20,000 policemen including State Reserved Police Force and CRPF personnel have been deployed across the city following incidents of stone pelting and violence by alleged MNS activists in suburban Mulund, Thane, Navi Mumbai, Borivali, Parel and Tardeo areas, police said. Miscreants attacked a toll booth located in the north-east suburb of Mulund and set one of the counters on fire, police said. Vandals targeted about 25 to 30 taxis parked in the Tardeo area of South Mumbai this morning and broke their windscreens, they said. Also, two separate incidents were reported in the North West suburb of Borivali where some miscreants attempted to burn trucks, police said, adding they also tried to set an autorickshaw on fire in the suburbs. Some MNS activists also allegedly tried to block roads in neighbouring Navi Mumbai but were prevented from doing so, police said.

12 CRPF men killed in Chhattisgarh Maoist attack

At least 12 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed when Maoists set off landmine blasts and opened fire on a patrol party in a forested stretch in Chhattisgarh's rebel-hit Bijapur district this afternoon, police said.The incident took place in Kongupelli village, some 400 km south of capital Raipur, when heavily armed insurgents waiting at a turning on a hilly portion first triggered multiple landmine blasts and then opened indiscriminate fire on a search party that was on foot. Six CRPF men were also injured and a Maoist was killed, police here said.

Economic Front:

Investors lose Rs 2 trillion

As Dalal Street broke the psychological 10,000-level on sheer panic selling, investor wealth to the tune of Rs 2 trillion got eroded in just a single day with experts confirming that weakness and volatility are here to stay. Total market capitalization of all the listed-companies on the Bombay Stock Exchange fell to Rs 32,40,151.07 crore today from Rs 34,03,497.28 crore on Thursday, a loss of Rs 1,63,346.21 crore. “The markets have given way to sheer panic; weakness and volatility are here to stay. Market is yet to form a trend as to where it wants to go,” Kejriwal Research and Investment Services (KRIS) official Mr Arun Kejriwal said. Market is suffering from a crisis of confidence and confidence can never be restored in a single day. Timing is important. Three to four days of consolidation was required to boost market sentiment, Mr Kejriwal added. Country's most valued firm Reliance Industries today lost Rs 13,374 crore with the scrip plunging as much as six per cent to settle at Rs 1,305.25 on BSE. Market capitalization of RIL stood at over Rs 1,89,750.65 crore today down from Rs 2,03,125.15 crore on Thursday while PSU major ONGC lost over Rs 5,839.12 crore today with its market capitalisation plunging to Rs 1,65,955.12 crore. Among other blue chips stocks, market-cap of telecom major

Bharti Airtel was down over Rs 10,373.12 crore, State Bank of India Rs 8,251.42 crore, PSU major NTPC Rs 13,233.97 crore and Reliance Communications ended with a loss of Rs 5,149.75 crore. After opening sharply higher, the 30-share barometer on the Bombay Stock Exchange shed 606.14 points or 5.73 per cent to end the day at 9,975.35, a closing level last seen on 20 June 2006. The 50-share Nifty of the National Stock Exchange also fell by 194.95 points, or 5.96 per cent, to close at 3,074.35. "Market plunged following continuous selling by FIIs in Indian markets and its not because that they do not believe in the Indian story but due to the severe liquidity crunch faced by them in their home countries", market analysts said. "Investor confidence is totally shaken but I think the worst is over for now," Research Bonanza Portfolio president Mr PK Agarwal said. Taurus Asset Management managing director Mr RK Gupta said the downturn in the market was largely because market was witnessing heavy foreign institutional investors (FIIs) redemption, with Citigroup and Nomura selling off substantially. FIIs were the net sellers in today's trade on the bourses as they sold equities worth Rs 915.54 crore, according to the provisional data available on the exchanges. "The volatility in the market is also because rumors doing rounds that DMK has withdrawn support from the government, which has created a political uncertainty in the market," Mr Gupta added.

Nano production in Uttarakhand

Tata Motors, which has already started interim production of Nano car from Pantnagar in Uttarakhand, is also planning to set up a small permanent production unit of the world's cheapest car in the industrial town."Tata Motors officials have conveyed to us that they are considering to set up a small permanent production unit of Nano in Pantnagar," chief secretary, Mr IK Pande said. Although Tata Motors decided to set up the mother plant of Nano at Sanand, Gujarat, its interim production has already started in Pantnagar, where the auto major produces Ace mini trucks. However, Mr Pande added that the company officials have not yet indicated that they would set up a new unit or convert the interim unit to permanent production facility for Nano. Meanwhile, when contacted the Tata Motors spokesperson said: "It is Tata Motors' view that even after the mother plant at Sanand becomes operational Tata Motors will continue to manufacture a certain volume of Nano at Pantnagar.

Gujarat woos global investors

Basking in the after-glow of the decision by Tata Motors to relocate their Nano car project to Gujarat, the state is now inviting investors from across the world in a range of sectors. With Gujarat gearing up to organise the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit 2009 on 12 and 13 January 2009, the chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, invited investors to the state at an Ambassadors' meeting here. As many as 70 diplomats, including 40 ambassadors from countries including China, Japan, Russia, Canada, Egypt, Switzerland, Pakistan, Greece and Germany, participated in the meet. Already globally known for its strides in the sectors of textile, chemicals, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, engineering and diamonds, Gujarat had also made good beginnings in ship building and railway coach making, Mr Modi said. "With the Nano car manufacturing in Gujarat, the state will have massive global presence in the surface transport system," he added. The state is capitalising on its long coastline of 1,600 km through port-led development, which included development of new ports, SEZs, connectivity with the hinterland, cold chain, ship-building yards, ship-repair facilities and inter-port transport systems. "We are pumping in an additional investment of Rs 150 billion for developing port-related infrastructure

at 10 intermediate and minor ports," Mr Modi said. Speaking on the SEZ, the chief minister said Gujarat was among the earliest states to enact an SEZ Act in 2004. "We have offered complete labour flexibility to the units set up in Gujarat. Today, as many as 55 SEZs have been approved in the state and these would be developed with world class amenities," he added.

'Indian producers should hike global share'

Indian manufacturing should aim at a five per cent global share, which is challenging but definitely achievable, according to think-tank KPMG. "This requires the manufacturing sector to grow at more than 10 per cent annually," the international organisation that groups together professional services firms said in its report titled 'Manufacturing India @ 75', released at a manufacturing summit organised by the CII.

Air traffic registers 19% decline

With Indian leisure travelers staying away from air travel due to fares hiked several times in recent months, India's air traffic fell to a five-year low with domestic passenger traffic registering a decline of 19 per cent in September. This is for the fourth consecutive month that passenger traffic has registered negative growth. The number of passengers carried by domestic airlines fell to 2.6 million as compared to 3.3 million in September 2007. Despite the reduction in number of flights operated by airlines, the load factor (the number of passengers carried per seat available) also declined.

Hindujas to invest in nuclear power

Confident that India can withstand the current global economic downturn, the Hinduja group said that they were widening the scope of their investments in India to include nuclear power plants in collaboration with foreign partners. The group chairman Mr SP Hinduja said here that the economic strength of India or any other country should not be measured by the performance of stock markets. "The Indian stock market is undergoing a correction which would not impact the solid economic foundation of the country. India's potentiality, the market size, investment opportunities it offers and the talent and skill of its people remain undiminished," he said in an interview. "In fact, this is the time to avail of investment opportunities in India. We are confident that Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, the architect of free market economy, and finance minister Mr P Chidambaram will continue the reform process so that investors face no hurdles," he said.Besides continuing its investments worth several billion dollars in 10 core sectors such as infrastructure, power, finance and banking, healthcare and automotive industry, the Hinduja group was now looking at investing in nuclear power plants against the backdrop of the Indo-US nuclear deal. The group was in discussion with potential partners in nuclear energy, Hinduja said but declined to give further details. The Hindujas see business opportunities worth at least $1 trillion in infrastructure in semi-urban areas, Mr Hinduja said.

Geo-strategic developments:

'India to be engaged in N-trade after certifications'

India could be engaged in nuclear trade after completion of all certifications under the nuclear deal, including those concerning the US' NPT obligations and enrichment technologies, a top Bush administration official has said, hoping the "bureaucratic process" will be over soon. "All of the certifications will have to be completed... to engage in nuclear trade. We have to have the agreement into force and we will exchange diplomatic notes when the President issues the certification... these are in the train," Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Mr. Evan Feigenbaum, said at a Round Table on US-India relations. He said there are two phases of certification and the first phase contains two that would have to be done by the President before the exchange of the diplomatic note and the entry into force of the Indo-US nuclear agreement. One concerns the NPT obligations of the USA and the other concerns the enrichment/reprocessing technologies. "Those are at the White House and I expect them to be done pretty soon - in the next week to ten days... It is basically a bureaucratic process," Mr. Feigenbaum said. "One of them has to do whether the Agreement is consistent with the NPT and the other has to do with American policy globally towards the spread of enrichment/reprocessing technologies. There are two certifications required in the Bill (on the nuclear deal) and we have prepared these. It is just a question of when the President signs and I would expect that would happen very quickly," Mr. Feigenbaum said. He also brushed aside the notion that the Presidential Statement and remarks during the signing of the legislation approving the US-India civilian nuclear cooperation agreement were somehow at "variance" with what officials of the administration have said.

Govt formulating policy on naval deployment in Gulf of Aden

India is formulating a policy on the issue of deploying naval ships to the Gulf of Aden in the wake of growing piracy in the region and the threat to Indian merchant shipping, the minister of state for defence, Mr M M Pallam Raju, said. The Indian Navy has already dispatched a warship to the region where Indian seamen on board a Japanese ship registered in Hong Kong are being held by pirates and the deadline for the ransom to release the crew is running out. On pay scales for the defence forces as sought by the three Chiefs of Staff, Mr Raju told reporters on the sidelines of an international conference on bridge building, "The Group of Ministers is looking into this and they would definitely give a positive report soon." He declined to give any time frame. Later, the Director General of Border Roads Organisation (BRO), Lt Gen A K Nanda, said the Zaranj-Delaram road in Afghanistan had been completed by the BRO and handed over to Afghanistan after which the organisation has pulled out.

Kashmir

J&K elections from 17 Nov

Overcoming differences within, the Election Commission announced an unprecedented seven-phase assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir beginning 17 November, saying it has taken a "risk" against the backdrop of boycott calls in the Valley. The three-member Election Commission

which was divided on holding polls gave the go ahead thereby signaling an end to the nearly six months of Governor's rule imposed after the Amarnath land row in July this year. Announcing the poll schedule, chief election commissioner Mr N Gopalaswami said the exercise was being undertaken at a “risk” in view of the stand of certain political parties and outfits. On whether political parties are ready for polls now, he said “it looks like. First you need to ask if political parties are ready. We are not conducting elections in a vacuum. Keeping harsh winter months in mind, the EC announced polls for Leh and Kargil of Ladakh division alongwith snowbound areas of Gurez, Bandipora and Sonawari in North Kashmir on 17 November. The seven-phase elections will be held on 17, 23, 30 November and 7, 13, 17 and 24 December. The counting of votes would take place on 28 December and the election process for the 87-member assembly has to be completed by 31 December this year, Mr Gopalaswami said. The assembly seats of Jammu and Srinagar cities would be going to polls in the last phase to be held on 24 December. To a question whether the Commission was apprehensive of low turnout or boycott, Mr Gopalaswami said: “We have never said to anybody giving a call for boycott. The EC has never prevented anybody giving a call of his own liking.” “What we have depended upon is political parties mobilising their voters and ensuring that the election goes on,” he said.

Kashmiri shawls get GI certification

World-famous Kashmiri Pashmina and Kani shawls are now protected against imitation, thanks to the Geographical Indication (GI) certification that will also give a boost to the handicraft industry of Jammu and Kashmir. Governor Mr NN Vohra t gave GI certificates to artisans and craftsman at a function here in the presence of Union minister of state for commerce Mr Jairam Ramesh. Describing the GI certification as a significant milestone, Mr Vohra also sought international registration of Kashmir's world-famous crafts to ensure value addition to these products. "This is indeed a great day for the local artisans," he added. Mr Vohra observed that the international registration in the European and American markets, though a difficult task, would be successfully accomplished for opening up new vistas of opportunities for Kashmiri handicrafts.

He hoped that with the GI certification the fake products in the name of Kashmiri crafts could be effectively checked and urged the artisans to maintain quality standards of their products. Mr Ramesh announced that Sozni, yet another renowned craft of Kashmir, was all set to be accorded the GI certification. He said the preliminary formalities in this regard had been completed and the decision was likely within a fortnight. Referring to the international certification and registration of Kashmiri crafts like Pashmina, Kani and Sozni and their logos Mr Ramesh said that the measures would protect these brands. He described the registration procedure as a painstaking process and said that this required extensive research regarding the origin, uniqueness, history and manufacturing process, which took 20 months.

Hurriyat meet on anti-poll campaign

A day after elections were announced in Jammu and Kashmir, the moderate faction of the Hurriyat Conference called for a joint meeting of its various ranks to finalise the "strategy" for anti-poll campaign. "A joint meeting of executive council, working committee and general council will take place on 22 October to take a final decision (for poll boycott campaign)," a spokesman of the faction said after an executive council meeting. The meeting, chaired by chairman Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, was attended by all the seven members.

Social front

Maid tortured for eating almonds

Chandigarh may have the highest per capita income in the country but its record in the treatment of children is not so good. In a barbaric incident, a 10-year-old maid was allegedly beaten up with hot rods by a couple in Sector 4 after she was found eating almonds. While the child is struggling for life in hospital, the police has registered a case under Sections 308 and 303, IPC, against the accused, identified as Arun Singla and his wife Neelam. The incident happened close on the heels of the death of a minor help under mysterious circumstances at the house of a businessman in Sector 17 a few days ago. In that case the police had not registered a case as the parents of the child did not suspect any foul play behind the death of their daughter. As per the complaint of Vasudev, father of the girl, Veena, she was thrashed by her employers and sent back in a critical condition to them at Kala Sanghia village in Kapurthala district. He said Veena was sent to the Singlas as he was working at a factory owned by their relatives. He alleged that the couple beat her up with hot iron rods when she was found eating almonds. They sent her home on Monday, he said. According to reports from Jalandhar, the child was still in the ICU of a private hospital.

5 debt-ridden Maharashtra farmers kill themselves

Five debt-ridden farmers from adjoining Buldana and Washim districts, including one from Kolhapur, have committed suicide by consuming poison, police said. According to the police, Mohnaji Potaji Lavale from Dharmabad village and Kantikrao Wamanrao Jadhav, from Buldana district consumed poison and ended their lives yesterday. Similarly, Nivruti Hariji Jadhav (70) and Suman Yashwant Jadhav (50) from adjoining Washim district committed suicide following mounting debts, police said. Suman ended her life by setting herself on fire on October 13, the police added. A 50-year-old farmer took his life in Gadhinglaj taluka, in Kolahpur, by consuming pesticide after failing to repay mounting debts, police said.

Pink city Asia's seventh best tourist spot: Survey

The Indian city of Jaipur has been named the seventh best city in Asia to visit and the highest rated hotel in the world is the Oberoi Udaivilas in Udaipur, Rajasthan, according to a latest report.

The survey, conducted by the elite magazine Conde Nast Traveller, also states that three of the

best five hotels in Asia are located in India with Oberoi Amarvilas coming in second and Oberoi Rajvilas bagging the fifth spot. Jet Airways has been ranked among the top international airlines for non-American routes by the readers of the magazine, coming in only after Silk Air of Singapore. More than 32,000 Cond Nast Traveller readers participated in the 2008 Readers Choice Survey, and the complete results will appear in the November issue of the magazine. “The 2008 Readers Choice Awards, with more than 32,000 readers voting, are a credit to the worldly expertise of our readerspassionate travelers for whom no island is too remote, no city too challenging, and no hotel too untested,” Klara Glowczewska, editor in chief of the magazine said.

“These awards celebrate the destinations, lodgings, and modes of transportation that exceed our expectations,” Glowczewska added. As per the report, the top four cities in Asia are Bangkok and Chiang Mai of Thailand and Hong Kong and Singapore while the top two hotels making the mark are the Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle in Chiang Rai, Thailand and Mombo and Little Mombo Camps in Moremi, Botswana.

Poor education, governance push India to 70th position on WPI

Quality of secondary education cost of starting a business and the lack of government effectiveness have led India to rally ahead of many South Asian nations ranking at 70 positon among 104 nations on the World Prosperity Index (WPI) 2008. "India has a relatively entrepreneurial culture. It requires government effectiveness and tackling corruption," Legatum Institute Managing Director Alan McCormick said. Increase in capital and education contributes directly to the value of physical and human capital and thus directly increases economic output. Poor governance and excessive bureaucracy impose costs on business and thus restrain growth, the report released last week said. The Institute also ranks India 10th on its 'Who's Going Places' list, with China on number six. "These countries have the best context right now within which to create wealth," McCormick said. "India outstrips many South Asian nations in various aspects of wealth creation. It ranks stronger with reference to other Asian countries in terms of avoiding dependence on commodity exports and foreign aid," McCormick said.

Foreign Relations

Bofors weapons meant for India damaged by peace activists

Four Swedish peace activists penetrated the fortress-like security at two facilities of ordnance company Bofors in southern Sweden and sought to sabotage the piled-up supplies destined for export to India. The activists entered the Karlskoga and Eskilstuna facilities of Bofors on Thursday night and claimed to have damaged grenade launchers of the Carl Gustaf brand meant for supply to India. “All the four activists were apprehended within a very short period by the company’s own security guards and arrested by the police. They were charged with unlawful

entry, extensive material damage and crime against the law," said Mr Svante Melin, criminal commissioner with the county police criminal branch in Eskilstuna. "There has been considerable damage inside the factories but its extent has not yet been estimated," he added.Ms Maja Backlund, spokesperson for OFOG - the group that assumed responsibility for the action - told IANS that the sabotage was carried out because the weapons are "in extensive use in Kashmir and other war zones in India".

'China welcomes India's rise'

Ahead of Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's second visit to China this year, a senior Chinese leader said that Beijing welcomes and supports India's rise and sees it as "mutually beneficial". "We welcome, support and hope to see the development of India because we believe it will provide opportunities for China as well. Likewise, we also believe that India also sees China in the same way," Mr Yu Zhengsheng, politburo member of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) central committee said here."In recent years the relationship between our two countries state-to-state, government-to-government, people-to-people ~ has witnessed rapid development. Bilateral ties between our two countries are now in very good shape," Mr Yu, also secretary of CPC in Shanghai, China's economic hub, told PTI in an interview. Dr Singh is scheduled to visit Beijing from 23-25 October to attend the Seventh Asia-Europe Summit. Dr Singh is expected to meet with China's top leadership during his stay in the Chinese capital. Dr Singh, who had visited China for the first time in January this year, had a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Mr Wen Jiabao in New York on 25 September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session.
Mr Yu is currently on a visit to India at the invitation of Congress president Mrs Sonia Gandhi. Apart from meeting the chairperson of the UPA, Mr Yu had separate meetings with external affairs minister Mr Pranab Mukherjee, commerce minister Mr Kamal Nath and BJP president Mr Rajnath Singh.The senior CPC leader noted that last year the bilateral trade between China and India jumped to over $38 billion, and it is expected to touch $50 billion this year, a new record. Mr Yu also noted that since the beginning of this year, the growth rate in exports from India to China was growing faster than China's exports to India. Mr Yu noted that recent years have witnessed the emergence of some major developing countries like China and India, which have contributed enormously to the world economy. "However, some people in the world see the emergence of the developing countries as a threat to them," he said. "On the one hand we can say that those people are not broad-minded and on the other hand we can say that they don't have enough knowledge of the success of their own economy."

India, Pakistan begin cross-LoC trade

Trucks laden with fruit, honey and spices from the Kashmir Valley waited near the heavily armed frontier on Tuesday as India and Pakistan opened a trade route between the two sides for the first time in six decades. "I was 12-years-old when I last saw baskets of fruits being packed to be sent to Rawalpindi in Pakistan," said Haji Abdul Ahad Bhat, a 74-year-old apple farmer from the

Kashmir side.The opening of the trade route was meant to bolster a 2004 peace agreement between the rivals, which has appeared increasingly fragile in recent months amid dozens of cross-border shootings and charges from New Delhi that Islamabad backed attacks in India. Separatists on the Indian side, who have stepped up demands for a trade route between Indian and Pakistani-controlled sections of Kashmir during recent mass protests against Indian rule, also hailed it as a victory. The trade route follows the introduction of other confidence-building measures in recent years, including the opening of rail and bus links between the two sides. On Tuesday the mood was festive as the crowd waited for the governor of Jammu & Kashmir to flag off the 13 pickup trucks heading to the Pakistani side. Four trucks were expected from Pakistan, carrying rock salt and raisins. “I'm completely hopeful that this will remove a lot of difficulties and create an atmosphere of friendship on the two sides,'' said the governor, Narendra Nath Vohra. Dozens of school children lined the road in Salamabad, a town near the Line of Control,, where a specially designed trading post has been set up with warehouses and security checks for the goods. The trucks were decorated with flags and banners reading ``Long live trade across the two sides.'' The head of a fruit growers' association said he hoped the renewed trade would ``transform the relationship between India and Pakistan to a more friendly one'' and extend trade opportunities for all. ``I hope our products will not just be sent to the other side, but eventually but to Central Asia and the Gulf,'' Gulam Rasool said. On Pakistan's side of the LoC, more than a dozen trucks carrying rock salt, garments and raisins waited to make the crossing. “We want that the people of Kashmir should come closer to each other,'' said Sardar Attique, a top official of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir as he waited in the border town of Chakothi for the Indian trucks to arrive. “We hope the process we are starting today would ultimately lead to the resolution of Kashmir issue,'' he said. For now, the route remains largely symbolic. After the inaugural exchange Tuesday, only four trucks will be allowed across from each side once a week. Kashmiri separatists claimed the move as a victory. ``This is the first step toward achieving economic independence for Kashmir,'' said separatist leader Mirwaiz Omer Farooq. Separatist groups have been fighting since 1989 to end Indian rule, leaving an estimated 68,000 people, most of them civilians, dead.