

### **ASEAN vows to stand firm against protectionism**

**The Times of India, 1 March 2009**

CHA-AM: Southeast Asian leaders vowed on Sunday to stand firm against protectionism and knit the diverse region into a European Union-style community by 2015 despite the global economic crisis. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in a statement released at the conclusion of its 14th annual summit, also called for "bold and urgent reform of the international financial system" that would take into account the needs of developing nations.

### **Invest on 575 M consumers—Asean**

**The Manila Times, 1 March 2009**

AS the global financial crisis continues to crack the whip on the world's economies, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) is eyeing what has largely been tapped—foreign direct investments (FDI) within the region. Asean groups the Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. It has a combined gross domestic product of more than \$1.4 trillion.

### **Thai economy to shrink more**

**The Straits Times, 1 March 2009**

BANGKOK: The struggling Thai economy is likely to contract further in the first three months of this year as exports take a hit from the global financial meltdown, the prime minister said on Sunday. Gross domestic product fell by 4.3 per cent in the fourth quarter of last year, and Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva warned worse could come. 'The government believes that the Thai economy in the first quarter of 2009 is likely to remain in the negative zone - equal to or down further than that of the fourth quarter last year,' said Mr Abhisit.

### **At Asean, reaching out to regular people**

**International Herald Tribune, 1 March 2009**

CHA-AM, Thailand: For more than four decades, leaders of Southeast Asian countries have convened regular but cloistered summit meetings to discuss topics as varied as bird flu and the creation of a single market stretching from Hanoi to Singapore. At its latest such meeting over the weekend, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations sought to reach out to the region's 570 million people with an anthem, a comic book for children and a new charter that begins, "We, the peoples..."

### **Export dip deadens Asean**

**The Manila Times, 2 March 2009**

HUA HIN, Thailand: Southeast Asian leaders called on Sunday for increased cooperation and urgent reform to deal with the global financial crisis. They made the call as they wrapped up a summit here dominated by their economic woes topped by falling exports. Leaders from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) have spent most of their annual meeting seeking ways to soften the impact of the meltdown on their export-driven economies, with millions of jobs at risk.

### **Philippines culls 6,000 pigs**

**The Straits Times, 2 March 2009**

MANILA: WORKERS in protective suits have begun culling 6,000 pigs at a northern Philippine farm to prevent the spread of the Ebola Reston virus that has infected some of the animals. Health officials say six farm and slaughterhouse workers in Bulacan province had developed antibodies to the virus after coming in contact with infected pigs but none of them have had any serious illness in the last 12 months.

### **Exxon says shuts Singapore refinery units for 6 wks**

**The Economic Times, 2 March 2009**

SINGAPORE: Exxon Mobil Corp said on Monday that it has shut down a couple of units in its refinery and chemical plant in Singapore for six weeks of planned maintenance. "We have commenced the shutdown of several operating units for planned maintenance from today and this is expected to last about six weeks," an Exxon spokeswoman said, confirming an earlier Reuters report.

### **Muslim nations seek closer ties in economic crisis**

**International Herald Tribune, 2 March 2009**

JAKARTA, Indonesia: Muslim nations need to forge closer ties to meet challenges posed by the global financial crisis, Indonesia's president said Monday at the opening of the annual World Islamic Economic Forum in Jakarta. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono proposed creating a Muslim support fund, noting that Islamic nations account for nearly half of the 50 least-developed and heavily indebted countries in the world.

### **Top communist rebel arrested in Philippines**

**Hindustan Times, 3 March 2009**

A top communist rebel leader blamed for extorting "revolutionary taxes" from businessmen in the Philippines has been arrested, the army said on Tuesday. Eduardo Sarmiento headed the regional party committee in the central Visayas region for the Communist Party of the Philippines New People's Army (CPP-NPA) and had standing arrest warrants for various crimes, the army said. "Mr Sarmiento was arrested alone and in possession of high explosives and fake identification cards," the army said in a statement.

### **BEML, Indonesian firm ink deal to bid for contract mining**

**Business Standard, 3 March 2009**

BEML, a public sector mining and construction equipment manufacturing company, has entered into an agreement with Sumber Mitra Jaya (SMJ) of Indonesia to bid for upcoming contract mining businesses in India. An agreement to this effect was signed between BEML and SMJ in New Delhi on Monday. The consortium approach includes agreement for investments in contract mining wherein 30 per cent of the investment will be made by BEML and 70 per cent by SMJ. Whereas BEML's investment will also comprise equipment, spares and services; Sumber Mitra Jaya will take care of planning and execution of contract mining. This strategic alliance of BEML with SMJ, evokes significance keeping in view large scale emerging opportunities arising out of the opening up of the coal blocks to private players to undertake contract mining, the company said in a statement.

### **Satyam CEO exudes confidence in Singapore**

**The Economic Times, 3 March 2009**

SINGAPORE: Assuring customers that "it's business as usual", embattled Satyam Computer on Tuesday said there has been a record level of new contracts in the Singapore region, which covers India, Africa, the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific, since the beginning of the year. On his first overseas trip to meet the staff, customers and government officials since his appointment on February 5, 2009, Company CEO A S Murty highlighted the commitment to Singapore, headquarters for its operations in the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, India and Africa.

### **Malaysia Jan export seen worst since 1981**

**The Financial Express, 3 March 2009**

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia's January exports are expected to suffer their steepest contraction in nearly thirty years, as dying demand hits an economy facing its first recession in eight years. The Southeast Asian country's exports have dropped 24.8 per cent in January from a year earlier, according to a Reuters poll of 10 economists, the biggest drop in nearly thirty years for which data is available. In December, exports fell 14.9 per cent.

### **Banks give \$4.6b in subsidised loans**

**Viet Nam News, 3 March 2009**

HA NOI: About VND80 trillion (US\$4.6 billion) has been disbursed at the Government-subsidised interest rate of 4 per cent as of Friday, February 20, reported the State Bank of Viet Nam. Figures published on the central bank's website show the following disbursement: The State-owned Mekong Housing Bank (MHB) VND1.42 trillion (\$81.61 million); the bank will provide VND24 trillion (\$1.38 billion) at the subsidised rate this year; about 15 Agribank branches in HCM City and others in the Cuu Long (Mekong) Delta about 12 trillion (\$689.65 million); and Sacombank VND2.03 trillion (\$116.72 million).

### **Philippines frees 10 convicted in Aquino murder**

**Hindustan Times, 4 March 2009**

Ten Philippine soldiers convicted in the 1983 assassination of former Senator Benigno Aquino Jr walked free on Wednesday after being pardoned by Philippine President Gloria Arroyo. The 10 were the remaining convicts of the 16 people found guilty of Aquino's murder on the tarmac of Manila's international airport on his return from exile in the United States. Aquino's killing sparked a popular, bloodless revolt in 1986 that ended the 20-year rule of Ferdinand Marcos and propelled his widow, Corazon Aquino, to the presidency.

### **Singapore firm predominant in India's FDI clearance**

**Business Standard, 4 March 2009**

The Government has cleared 29 FDI proposals worth Rs 616 crore, more than half of which will be brought in by AAPC of Singapore in the hotel business in India. AAPC Singapore Pte Ltd will invest Rs 365.78 crore in an Indian company for constructing and managing low-budget hotels as per the proposals cleared on the recommendation of the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB). However, the government has deferred as many as 19 proposals including those of Hiranandani Realtors, Yamaha Motor India, BNP Paribas Securities Services and Quippo Telecom. It also rejected a proposal by ICP Investments (Mauritius) Ltd.

### **World Bank approves \$2 billion contingency loan for Indonesia**

**International Herald Tribune, 4 March 2009**

WASHINGTON: The World Bank on Tuesday approved a \$2 billion contingency loan for Indonesia, which the government will be able to draw upon should market conditions and access to credit worsen because of the global crisis.

The loan is part of an overall \$5.5 billion contingency financing facility for Indonesia, which could include \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion each from Australia, Japan and the Asian Development Bank.

### **Less imported raw materials: Industrial output to fall**

**The Jakarta Post, 4 March 2009**

In addition to declining exports, Indonesia's industry is under another threat of equally great significance — a continued drop in imports of key raw materials. Such conditions could have a major impact on the unemployment rate, said Edy Putra, a deputy to the Coordinating Minister for the Economy, on Tuesday. "We still have a surplus trade balance but the significance is relatively small, as domestic production growth raises a concern as imports of raw materials continue to drop," Edy said. "That means there is a trend to reduce productivity of domestic industry, which will affect the unemployment rate sooner or later," he told The Jakarta Post.

### **Malaysia plans \$2.7 bn economic stimulus**

**The Economic Times, 5 March 2009**

LUMPUR: Malaysia's government unveiled plans Thursday to inject 10 bn ringgit (\$2.7 bn) to stimulate the sagging economy and avert a recession. This will bring the total stimulus spending to 17 bn ringgit (\$4.6 bn) after a 7 bn ringgit (\$1.9 bn) package announced in November. But some economists warned it may be insufficient to keep recession at bay.

### **Thai-Lao rail service commences**

**Bangkok Post, 5 March 2009**

er Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn presided over the inauguration of the rail service linking Thanaleng train station in Laos and Nong Khai province in Thailand at 7.45am on Thursday. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and Lao Deputy Prime Minister Boonyoung Worlajit also attended. State Railway of Thailand (SRT) governor Yutthana Thapcharoen said about 500 passengers were expected to use this 3.5-kilometre rail service on a daily basis. The train will make four round trips a day over the Mekong river. A third-class ticket costs 20 baht and second-class 80 baht, he said.

### **Number of layoffs up, Labor says**

**The Manila Times, 5 March 2009**

The global crisis continued to take its toll on Filipinos, as the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) announced on Wednesday that as of this week, 40,191 workers have been laid off. Plus, the number of retrenched Filipinos working abroad has reached 5,700, the department added. The figures were up slightly from the previous report released in February—40,000 laid off in the Philippines and 5,400 retrenched overseas workers.

### **Thai PM agrees to study monarchy law reform**

**Hindustan Times, 6 March 2009**

Thai Premier Abhisit Vejjajiva on Friday agreed to consider reforming tough laws protecting the kingdom's revered monarchy following the launch of an international campaign. Critics of the lese

majeste law, which criminalises any insult or defamation of Thailand's royal family, say it is being used for political ends amid a growing crackdown on alleged violators. More than 50 experts, including philosopher Noam Chomsky, have signed a campaign letter to be sent to the prime minister, but Abhisit pre-empted them on Friday by admitting to "problems" with the law's enforcement.

**Reliance sells 1st gasoline from new refinery**  
**The Financial Express, 6 March 2009**

Singapore: Reliance Industries sold its first non-oxygenated gasoline cargo, a grade acceptable to countries such as Australia and the United States, from its new refinery for end-March loading, sources said on Friday. The 95-octane parcel was sold to an undisclosed oil major at parity to a \$1.00 a barrel discount to Singapore spot quotes, on a free-on-board (FOB) basis, one source said.

**Malaysia to lay off 15,000 foreign staff every month**  
**The Financial Express, 6 March 2009**

Kuala Lumpur: In a bid to protect domestic workers from retrenchment following global financial crisis, Malaysian government has planned to recruit 15,000 locals every month by replacing foreigners, including Indian, working in various sectors in the country. The government has said that it is to identify a few sectors where its citizens could work replacing foreigners. The human resources ministry is looking at turning over to locals 15,000 jobs a month currently held by foreign workers, local media said here on Thursday.

**Singapore Cargo, IBM eye Deccan Cargo stake**  
**Business Standard, 7 March 2009**

Intel Capital renews earlier investment proposal. The list of investors who want to board GR Gopinath's end-to-end logistics venture, Deccan Cargo, is growing. After names like Anil Ambani and Azim Premji's investment arms that were apparently interested, IBM Venture Capital and Singapore Cargo have shown interest. The two seem likely to join Intel Capital as the three investors who will cumulatively invest around \$55 million in this venture, which is hoping to take off by June 2009. Industry sources say Intel Capital has shown definite interest in investing \$25 million in this venture. "A time-bound proposal given by them had recently expired, but Intel has renewed it," say sources.

**Philippine mining hit hard by global crisis**  
**The Manila Times, 7 March 2009**

Mining companies in the Philippines are cutting staff, putting some projects on hold and scrambling for cash as the global crisis drags down prices commodities, industry officials said. The economic slowdown could not have come at a worse time for the resource-rich Southeast Asian country, which had been trying to rebuild the mining industry after a similar downturn in the 1970s.

**Three dead in Philippine pirate attack: official**

**Hindustan Times, 8 March 2009**

Pirates attacked a fishing boat in the southern Philippines, killing three crewmen and taking two others hostage as they fled with the vessel, a local official said on Sunday. The pirates opened fire on the unidentified vessel late Thursday off the island of Basilan before they boarded it and killed the three crewmen, said Al Rasheed Sakkalahul, Basilan's deputy governor. Authorities later recovered the fishing trawler but found no one on board, he said, adding the boat had been completely stripped.

**Domestic borrowing and fiscal reforms**

**The Manila Times, 8 March 2009**

What we've warned about in this space has come to pass. The government announced that it would raise its domestic borrowing program to bridge an expected widening in its budget deficit. From an original estimate of about one percent of the economy as measured by the country's gross domestic product (GDP), the ratio would double, indicating a worsening of its revenue position.

**Singapore called most 'innovative' nation -study**

**The Economic Times, 9 March 2009**

WASHINGTON: Singapore is the most innovative nation in the world, while South Korea placed first among 20 large countries, according to a study released on Monday by a manufacturing group. The United States was eighth in the overall list of 110 countries and second in the subset of large nations, said the report, produced by the Washington-based National Association of Manufacturers and the Boston Consulting Group.

**RP economy seen bruised in 1st quarter**

**The Manila Times, 9 March 2009**

The Philippine economy will be hit hard by the global financial crisis during the first quarter, as remittances from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), which feeds private consumption, would decline this year, according Barclays Capital. In a report, the foreign financial institution said the country's gross domestic product (GDP) would fall 0.8 percent in the first quarter this year. A proxy for economic output, GDP is the amount of goods and services produced locally.

**M'sian economy 'buckling'**

**The Straits Times, 9 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's economy is 'buckling under the pressure of a global recession' and could contract by two percent this year, opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim has warned. Mr Anwar, who was finance minister before being ejected from the ruling Barisan Nasional-controlled government in 1998, said at least 400,000 people risk losing their jobs in 2009. 'The days and months ahead will not be easy,' he said in comments published on his blog late on Sunday.

**Malaysia unveils \$16.2 billion economic stimulus plan**

**International Herald Tribune, 10 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysia's government unveiled a massive 60 billion ringgit (\$16.2 billion) economic stimulus package, but acknowledged the export-dependent nation may

not be able to avoid a recession and mounting job losses. "The implementation of such a large stimulus package is unprecedented in the nation's history," Finance Minister Najib Razak told Parliament in a speech Tuesday to detail what has been dubbed a mini-budget. "Without these efforts, the economy faces the prospect of a deep recession."

### **Malaysia announces \$16 billion in spending to save jobs**

**International Herald Tribunes, 10 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia unveiled a plan for new spending worth 60 billion ringgit, or \$16.27 billion, Tuesday, in an attempt to save jobs in its export-dependent economy. Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak, who will become prime minister March 31, said to Parliament that the two-year spending package was the equivalent of 9 percent of gross domestic product, making it among the largest plans recently announced in Asia.

### **Delay in RP stimulus package seen**

**The Manila Times, 10 March 2009**

The Philippines' fiscal stimulus package may be delayed due to allegations of fraud attending a World Bank-funded road project, a US-based think tank said "The controversy over alleged collusion in infrastructure projects, which has reportedly further strained relations between World Bank officials and the current administration, may yet be another factor to derail pump-priming plans by slowing the arrival of much-needed soft loans for infrastructure and social spending," Global Source said.

### **Malaysia pulls visas for 55,000 Bangladesh workers**

**International Herald Tribune, 11 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Bangladesh on Wednesday expressed shock at Malaysia's decision to revoke work visas for more than 55,000 Bangladeshis, a move aimed at filling those jobs with Malaysians facing layoffs. Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar on Tuesday ordered the visas for 55,147 Bangladeshis approved in 2007 to be canceled to stave off unemployment at home, which is expected to rise to 4.5 percent from 3.7 percent last year.

### **Philippines enacts law claiming disputed islands**

**International Herald Tribune, 11 March 2009**

MANILA, Philippines: The Philippine president has signed a law affirming sovereignty over islands also claimed by China and Vietnam, an official said Wednesday, sparking protests over the control of strategic South China Sea islands. The legislation, signed Tuesday by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, reaffirms Philippine sovereignty over the more than 7,100 islands in its archipelago, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said. It also claims outlying islands in the Spratly chain and Scarborough Shoal — two regions in the South China Sea.

### **Indon defence university**

**The Straits Times, 11 March 2009**

JAKARTA: Indonesia opened its first defence university on Wednesday, a step in the transition of its military from political players to a professional armed forces as Jakarta aims to play a greater global security role. 'The institution will transform military and defence education with the long-term aim of transforming and modernising the Indonesian armed forces' culture,' Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono said at the opening, describing the 'urgent need in

improving skills and capabilities in strategic defence'.

### **India to buy S'pore howitzers?**

**The Straits Times, 11 March 2009**

NEW DELHI: Singapore is the front runner to supply the Indian military's planned purchase of ultralight howitzers, the Republic's first major defence contract from South Asia's dominant power, people familiar with the developments said. 'Most of the technical evaluation of the contract to buy 145 pieces of the ultra-lightweight 155mm cannons has been done,' said an Indian official who has proved reliable in the past.

### **Malaysia ruling party rocked by bribery probe**

**Hindustan Times, 12 March 2009**

The ruling party was rocked today by a high-level investigation involving bribery allegations and a prominent minister preparing to run in a party election that will shape Malaysia's next administration. In a vaguely worded statement today, the Tourism Ministry said "some of its personnel have been asked to provide statements" to assist the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission in its investigations. It denied that any offense has occurred, but said the ministry will "extend its cooperation in all investigations," including a probe into misuse of ministry funds.

### **Barun Roy: Tale of two Asias**

**Business Standard, 12 March 2009**

Unlike countries like Cambodia and China, the sub-continent hasn't managed to rise above its old conflicts. The beginning, last month, in Cambodia, of a process to bring former Khmer Rouge leaders to trial for their role in a reign of genocide in the 1970s that left at least 1.7 million people dead, is meant to formally close a chapter of Cambodian history that nobody wants to remember. Cambodia has outlived its fractious past and is moving convincingly towards a future of common economic well-being with the rest of Southeast Asia.

### **Newspaper: Singapore may win India arms contract**

**International Herald Tribune, 12 March 2009**

Singapore: A newspaper says India may buy \$1 billion Singapore dollars (\$651 million) of artillery from a local company. The Straits Times cites unidentified Indian officials as saying that India is mulling a contract to buy 145 ultra-lightweight howitzers from ST Kinetics, a unit of Singapore Technologies Engineering Ltd. ST Kinetics spokeswoman Jackie Yu confirmed to The Associated Press on Thursday that the company bid on the contract, but declined to comment further. A spokesman at the Indian High Commission in Singapore was not immediately available for comment.

### **4,000 more troops for the far South**

**Bangkok Post, 12 March 2009**

The government has approved another 4,000 security personnel for the far South in an effort to break the back of the insurgency and win back hearts and minds. The new security force, including troops, police and civil servants from the Internal Security Operations Command (Isoc), will be deployed in villages as part of a community relations mission to reach out more to villagers. Isoc spokesman Thanathip Sawangsaeng said the new contingent would reinforce the

62,000 security personnel already in the South. About 38,000 of the existing force are soldiers.

### **Malaysian lawmaker sues over detention**

**Hindustan Times, 13 March 2009**

A Malaysian opposition lawmaker sued the country's home minister, police chief and a senior police officer on Friday for her wrongful arrest last year under the tough Internal Security Act (ISA). Teresa Kok, from the Democratic Action Party (DAP), a member of the opposition Pakatan Rakyat alliance, was arrested in September for alleged involvement in a petition to silence the call to prayer from mosques in non-Muslim areas.

### **SOUTH-EAST ASIA: Reverse migration challenges stability**

**International Herald Tribune, 13 March 2009**

South-east Asia's regional economy is heavily dependent on legal and illegal labor migration. Large number of workers from larger and poorer countries, notably Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, are drawn towards the more prosperous states of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Hundreds of thousands from Burma and South Asia also find work in the region, while economically dynamic urban areas also act as magnets for workers from rural areas.

### **Singapore January retail sales plunge 12 percent**

**International Herald Tribune, 13 March 2009**

SINGAPORE: Singapore's retail sales plunged in January as shoppers turned away from big-ticket items amid the city-state's worst recession in decades. Retail sales fell 12 percent in January from a year earlier — accelerating from a 1.6 percent fall in December — the statistics department said in a statement Friday. Singapore's gross domestic product plunged a seasonally adjusted, annualized 16.4 percent in the fourth quarter from the previous quarter — the country's worst contraction since splitting from Malaysia in 1965 — as a collapse in demand from the U.S., Europe and Japan hit the Southeast Asian nation's exports.

### **Vietnam protests maritime law**

**The Straits Times, 13 March 2009**

HANOI: VIETNAM protested against a bill signed into law in the Philippines, saying that it lays claim to parts of the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, state media said on Friday. 'Vietnam protests against the act and calls on the Philippines to refrain from undertaking similar actions so as not to affect peace and stability in the region and the growing ties between the two countries', foreign affairs spokesman Le Dung was quoted as saying in Vietnam News daily

### **Singapore's Creative Technology to shed 300 jobs**

**The Times of India, 14 March 2009**

SINGAPORE: Struggling Singaporean digital entertainment products maker Creative Technology is to cut 300 jobs globally, mostly in Europe and the United States, the company said. It said in a statement late Friday that there would be a restructuring charge of 10 million dollars for severance payments and headcount cost reductions in the current third quarter ending

March. The Singapore-listed firm has struggled to make inroads against Apple's iconic iPod in the MP3 or digital music player market despite pumping in massive investments.

### **Govt pledges no layoffs in state companies**

**The Jakarta Post, 14 March 2009**

The Office of State Enterprises (SOE) Minister pledges no layoffs by its companies this year although the global crisis is worsening. "The ministry won't allow layoffs of SOE employees because we're optimistic the companies can survive the crisis," secretary to the SOE minister Said Didu said on Friday. He said that the ministry had given out instructions to its enterprises to avoid layoffs and to seek other alternatives to them when problems arose.

### **PM: Recovery will take longer**

**Bangkok Post, 14 March 2009**

Thailand's economic recovery will be delayed and positive growth might not be seen until the final quarter of this year, later than forecast, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva says. After talks with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown focusing on the global economy, Mr Abhisit admitted that expectations for the Thai economy - hit by last year's mass protests and the global slowdown - had been lowered. Mr Abhisit is visiting Britain from March 13-15 at the invitation of the British government. "I think we are now looking at a delay in recovery. The projections for the global economy have been lowered," Mr Abhisit told journalists in England.

### **M'sia's Q1, Q2 to be 'bad'**

**The Straits Times, 14 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's economy is going to suffer in the first couple of quarters this year, a top minister was quoted as saying on Saturday, as the export-dependent country battles dying growth. 'The first two quarters are going to be bad,' Second Finance Minister Nor Mohamed Yakcop told the Edge financial weekly. Malaysia on Tuesday announced a 60 billion ringgit (\$27 billion) stimulus package to boost the economy.

### **Indonesian aviation industry: How are you today?**

**The Jakarta Post, 15 March 2009**

On Feb. 6, 2009, the Ministry of Transportation held the second National Civil Aviation Safety Summit in Jakarta. After the opening ceremony, the Minister of Transportation Jusman Syafei Djamal stated that there was no longer any reason for the European Union to continue to ban Indonesian airlines flying to Europe. With the implementation of Law 1/2009 on aviation, it showed that Indonesia had complied with the rules imposed by the EU. He went on to announce the news that the EU would come to Indonesia to check on how well Indonesia had responded to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) findings a few years ago. The team would begin their visit on Feb. 23, 2009.

### **M'sia cuts worker permits**

**The Straits Times, 15 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: MALAYSIA has slashed its work permit approvals for foreign workers by almost 70 per cent so far this year, faced with the twin threat of layoffs and recession, according to a report on Sunday. In January and February, an average of 250 permits were approved daily compared to 800 last year, following a more stringent vetting process by the authorities, a Home

Ministry official told the Star newspaper.

### **Alarm over China drug arrests**

**The Straits Times, 15 March 2009**

MANILA: At least 16 Filipinos have been arrested since January for trying to smuggle drugs into China, Hong Kong and Macau, prompting the Philippine government to renew a warning that traffickers can face the death penalty, an official said Sunday. Last year, 111 Filipinos, mostly women, were arrested in those destinations for drug-related offenses - a huge jump from 16 in 2007, Philippine Ambassador to China Sonia Brady said. Of those taken into custody the last two years, 22 have been sentenced to death and 12 to life in prison. Others received shorter sentences, she said.

### **Won't sell stake in Indonesian coal mines: Tata Power**

**Business Standard, 16 March 2009**

Tata Power today set to rest speculation that it was trying to sell its stake in two Indonesian coal mines owned by PT Bumi Resources. "We strongly deny the rumours regarding our stakes in Indonesian Coal mines - KPC and Arutmin," Tata Power said in a statement here. Tata Power Company holds 30 per cent stake in PT Kaltim Prima Coal and PT Arutmin Indonesia, owned by Jakarta-based PT Bumi Resources Tbk. "This acquisition is a key part of the Company's growth strategy and we have no intention to sell our stake in the coal mines to Bumi Resources or any other party," India's largest private sector power utility said.

### **Indonesia kicks off election campaign**

**Hindustan Times, 16 March 2009**

Campaigning for Indonesia's third general elections since the fall of the Suharto dictatorship got under way today along with the global economic crisis squarely at the forefront of voters' concerns, representatives of 38 parties met at an exhibition hall in the capital Jakarta to sign a joint declaration promising a peaceful campaign period leading up to the April 9 polls in the world's third-largest democracy. The vote is taking place against slowing growth in Southeast Asia's biggest economy as demand for Indonesia's commodities exports plummets amid the world financial meltdown.

### **Govt gears up to limit free trade deal adversities**

**The Jakarta Post, 16 March 2009**

Indonesia is preparing massive financial and technical support for meat and tropical fruit businesses in a bid to cash in on ASEAN's free trade deals with Australia and New Zealand. The Agriculture Ministry's director general of husbandry, Tjeppy D. Soedjana, said Saturday the ministry had proposed Rp 145 billion (US\$12.18 million) this year from the stimulus package to boost competitiveness of the country's meat, milk and dairy businesses against foreign competitors.

### **China ship off to Spratlys**

**The Manila Times, 16 March 2009**

China has dispatched its most modern patrol ship to the South China Sea, state press said Sunday, after an incident with a US naval vessel and a fresh claim by the Philippines to disputed territory. The Beijing News said the vessel would conduct patrols on what it called China's

exclusive maritime zone in the disputed waters surrounding the Paracel and Spratly Islands.

### **Brunei, Malaysia settle spat**

**The Straits Times, 16 March 2009**

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN (Brunei): BRUNEI and Malaysia sealed a pact Monday to settle a maritime territorial dispute that has blocked the exploration of rich offshore oil reserves off Borneo island for six years. Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi signed the agreement at a ceremony in Hassanal's palace to resolve the spat that has been an irritant to the neighbors' warm bilateral ties.

### **IIFL seeks license in Singapore, offers structured products**

**The Economic Times, 17 March 2009**

KOLKATA: Financial services provider India Infoline Ltd today said it is seeking license for brokerage and investment banking services in Singapore and is offering structured financial products to its wealth management clients in association with Deutsche Bank. "With setback among existing majors like Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs and Morgan we want to tap the opportunity. This would give us pan Asia footprint. We want to open brokering activity in Singapore and Hong Kong. We have already applied for license in Singapore for brokerage and investment banking," IIFL Chairman Nirmal Jain said here today.

### **Two killed in Philippine grenade attack**

**The Times of India, 17 March 2009**

ZAMBOANGA (Philippines): Two people were killed and at least four others wounded in a grenade attack blamed on Islamic militants in the southern Philippines, police and military said today. Men believed to be members of the Abu Sayyaf group tossed the grenade into a karaoke bar on Jolo island yesterday, police said. The Abu Sayyaf are also holding three Red Cross volunteers including an Italian and a Swiss national in Jolo's interior jungles and police said the attack could have been meant to divert military pressure on the kidnappers.

### **Malaysia to reduce number of foreign workers**

**The Times of India, 17 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: In a move that could affect Indian workers seeking jobs in Malaysia, the Malaysian government on Tuesday said it hopes to reduce the number of foreign workers in the country to 1.8 million by 2010 from the present over two million. Home minister Syed Hamid Albar said the authorities had managed to reduce the number of foreign workers by 60,000 since last March. As of December 2008, there were 2.06 million foreign workers in Malaysia, which relies heavily on them to help out in the construction and plantation sectors.

### **Reliance to revive Singapore trading arm**

**The Financial Express, 18 March 2009**

New Delhi: Reliance Industries plans to revive its Singapore trading desk, which saw the departure of trading head Michael Ng and his team last month, a company spokesman said on Wednesday. "We had set up Reliance Global Energy Singapore Pte Ltd with a long-term strategic view and will meet the staffing requirements. We will make relevant announcements in due course," he said. In September, Reliance announced the forming of the trading firm to market fuel from its refineries.

### **Malaysia's Maxis Comm commits \$10 bn to India unit**

**The Economic Times, 18 March 2009**

NEW DELHI: Malaysia's Maxis Communications Bhd, which owns 74 per cent of Indian mobile operator Aircel, has committed \$10 billion for the expansion of its Indian unit, its chief executive said on Wednesday. The Malaysian firm has already spent \$5 billion this year, Sandip Das said as the company launched mobile services in the lucrative Delhi service area. Aircel will expand coverage to 18 of India's 22 telecom zones in the next few days and coverage will be extended to the rest of the country over the next 24 months, he said.

### **India Infoline to launch investment banking services in Singapore**

**Business Standard, 18 March 2009**

India Infoline, a domestic brokerage firm, is planning to launch broking and investment banking services in Singapore in the next one year. The company had applied for licence to start broking and investment banking services in Singapore, said Nirmal Jain, chairman and managing director, India Infoline at a press conference in Kolkata on Tuesday. The company intended to start broking services in Hong Kong subsequently, he added.

### **Govt will buffer impact**

**The Straits Times, 19 March 2009**

The government will help buffer the impact of the downturn on Singaporeans and businesses, but Singapore will not emerge from the crisis until the global economy starts to heal, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has said. He made the point to the BBC in an interview aired on Thursday, during which he described the current downturn as 'the most severe' since World War II. Singapore, which has an open and export-reliant economy, could not spend its way out of a recession, he indicated on the Asia Business Report programme.

### **Malaysia is roiled by a crisis of democracy**

**International Herald Tribune, 19 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: A slew of political scandals gripping Malaysia and a transfer of power fraught with uncertainty have embroiled the elite here with exquisitely poor timing. As a major trading nation, Malaysia is being slammed by the global downturn, its exports collapsing by nearly one-third and current projections showing that its economy will shrink by as much as 5 percent this year. Yet the main preoccupation of the government and opposition parties appears to be what analysts are describing as an increasingly dysfunctional political system:

### **Binani Cement eyes coal blocks in Indonesia**

**Business Standard, 19 March 2009**

Binani Cement, a subsidiary of Binani Industries, is looking to acquire coal blocks in Indonesia to meet its energy requirements, a company official said today. Binani Cement Managing Director of Binani Cement Vinod Juneja said the company was eyeing coal blocks in Indonesia and would be finalised in the next few months. Juneja said the coal blocks have reserves of around 6 million tonnes per annum. Besides, the company plans to commission its one mtpa capacity cement plant in Mauritius.

### **Japan offers aid for shift to digital TV**

**The Manila Times, 20 March 2009**

Tokyo is willing to provide a sweetener to ensure the Philippines will adopt Japan's standard for digital terrestrial TV (DTT). The Philippines plans to migrate from an analog to a digital platform by 2015. Hideo Fuseda, Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications director for digital broadcasting technology, said Tokyo is willing to support the Philippines for its shift to digital TV.

### **EU-SEA trade policy to change**

**The Straits Times, 20 March 2009**

BERLIN: The European Union is poised to alter its south-east Asia trade policy to deal with individual members of the Asean trade alliance rather than with the bloc as a whole, a senior official said on Friday. The German daily Handelsblatt quoted EU Trade Commissioner Catherine Ashton as saying: 'The process with Asean up to now has been very slow. We must now check how we can move forward quicker with individual countries that are prepared to do so.' The 10-member Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean) agreed with the EU to launch talks on a regionwide free-trade accord in May 2007.

### **WTO to examine Thai complaint against US**

**International Herald Tribune, 20 March 2009**

GENEVA: The World Trade Organization will examine a complaint by Thailand that U.S. taxes on imports of plastic bags from Thailand violate international trade rules, the body's officials said Friday. Thailand says the United States calculates the taxes on these imports in a way to set them higher than allowed. The U.S. has denied the allegations, but says it does not object to the WTO investigation and that it will cooperate with Thailand to resolve the problem.

### **Indonesia hails talks with Papuan rebel leader**

**International Herald Tribune, 20 March 2009**

JAKARTA, Indonesia: Indonesia hailed meetings with a rebel leader who returned to the country after more than 40 years in exile as a good first step toward negotiating an end to a decades-long insurgency in Papua province. Nicholas Jouwe, 85, a co-founder of the Free Papua Movement, said Friday he came back at the government's invitation and was willing to discuss the rebel group's struggle for independence. He denied reports that the rebels were ready to give up.

### **Malaysia aims to halve foreign labour by 2010: Minister**

**The Economic Times, 20 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: In a move which will shrink jobs for India, Indonesia, Bangladesh immigrants here Malaysian authorities said they expect to halve the construction sector's dependence on foreign labour when a new system is adopted reducing manual labour by 80 per cent. Works Minister Mohd Zin Mohammed said the Industrialised Building System (IBS) expected to be fully adopted by 2010.

### **Singapore 'needs' foreigners for economic survival**

**Bangkok Post, 21 March 2009**

Singapore, which is facing its worst recession in history, needs foreigners to survive in the long-term, founding father Lee Kuan Yew said. The city-state is not reproducing itself fast enough and

the government has in recent years opened its doors to attract more talented migrants to avert a serious population shortage. "Without new citizens and permanent residents, we are going to be 'The Last of the Mohicans'. We will disappear," Lee, 85, told an audience at a local university late Friday.

### **Bangko Sentral approves JICA program loan**

**The Manila Times, 21 March 2009**

The policy making body of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) has approved in principle the government's program loan for fiscal sustainability from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr., said JICA would provide 9.3 billion yen, or \$94 million to support Philippine fiscal sustainability under the Development Policy Support, subprogram 2 (DPSP 2). The program loan has a payment period of 30 years and an interest rate of 1.4 percent.

### **M'sia inflation eases to 3.7%**

**The Straits Times, 21 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's inflation eased to 3.7 per cent year-on-year in February from 3.9 per cent a month earlier, official data showed on Friday, as demand falls in the slowing economy. The Department of Statistics said the consumer price index for January to February had risen by 0.2 per cent. 'The fall in inflation is expected due to slower growth,' Wan Suhaimi Saidi, an economist with Kenanga Investment Bank, told AFP. 'Going forward, inflation will slow down due to falling consumer demand and this gives room for the central bank to further cut interest rate,' he added.

### **Thai PM, ministers survive no confidence vote**

**The Times of India, 21 March 2009**

BANGKOK: Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and five ministers on Saturday easily survived a vote of no confidence called by the opposition following a two-day debate on allegations of corruption. The censure motion against the premier failed with 246 MPs voting for him and 176 against. "Therefore the prime minister remains in his position," said house speaker Chai Chidchob.

### **RI, Aussie agree on joint sea patrols**

**The Jakarta Post, 22 March 2009**

Indonesia and Australia have agreed on campaigning against poaching and on joint sea patrols around their maritime territorial boundaries in eastern part of Indonesian waters. During the sixth meeting of the Working Group on Marine and Fisheries (WGMAF) Indonesia-Australia in Nusa Dua, Bali last week, the two countries, which had met several times to discuss poaching issues, finally reached agreement to jointly combat the illegal acts. "In tackling with poaching, both countries have agreed on developing campaigns against poaching in eastern Indonesia. We've also agreed on conducting joint patrols at maritime boundaries between the two countries,"

### **\$13b boost to attract investors**

**The Straits Times, 22 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: A special package will be offered by the middle of the year to bring in foreign direct investments worth RM30 billion (S\$12.5 billion) to Malaysia over the next two

years. International Trade and Industries Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the package would introduce better incentives than what are currently offered. 'Some examples of better incentives include increasing the length of time companies can enjoy pioneer status while also tailoring investment packages for companies bringing in high-level investments.'

### **Thai PM: 1 million unemployed expected in 2009**

**International Herald Tribune, 22 March 2009**

BANGKOK: Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva announced measures Sunday to battle Thailand's economic woes, which include unemployment expected to rise to at least a 1 million workers this year. Abhisit, who survived a no-confidence vote in Parliament on Saturday, said the government was launching an intensive job training program, would introduce several more economic stimulus packages and borrow funds from foreign lenders for infrastructure projects.

### **RI-China join forces in investment and industry**

**The Jakarta Post, 23 March 2009**

Indonesia and China have on Monday agreed to enhance cooperation in investment and the industrial sector. "The cooperation between Indonesia and China, particularly the Jilin province, is, among others, in matters of the economy and development," Industry Minister Fahmi Idris said, as quoted by Antara newswire. Idris is currently in Jilin province to officiate the opening of a cooperation forum sponsored by the Industry Ministry. According to kompas.com, the forum is the fourth initiative to be held between the two parties. A Memorandum of Understanding on research and industry development was also signed at the ceremony.

### **45,000 new job openings**

**The Straits Times, 23 March 2009**

AT LEAST 45,000 new jobs will be up for grabs in the next two years, with many of them suitable for professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs). In giving the update on Monday, Acting Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong also listed where they are to be found. But he had a word of advice for jobless PMETs: Be flexible and go for training to get the right skills for jobs in new industries. Mr Gan was replying to MPs Irene Ng (Tampines GRC), Lim Wee Kiak (Sembawang GRC), Zaqy Mohamad (Hong Kah GRC) and Penny Low (Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC), who had highlighted their plight.

### **Malaysia opposition newspapers banned for 3 months**

**International Herald Tribune, 23 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: The Malaysian government banned the opposition's flagship newspapers Monday for three months, an official said, igniting fears of a crackdown on press freedom amid mounting political tensions. Opposition officials received letters from the Home Ministry suspending the publication licenses of the Harakah and Suara Keadilan newspapers through the end of June, said Tian Chua, a Parliament lawmaker representing the opposition People's Justice Party.

### **Indonesia's Aceh province tense ahead of elections**

**International Herald Tribune, 23 March 2009**

JAKARTA, Indonesia: Tension in Indonesia's formerly war-torn province of Aceh has escalated ahead of April's parliamentary elections, with 16 people killed and dozens of buildings and cars

damaged in recent months, monitoring groups said Monday. Most casualties resulted from personal disputes, but several appear to be political assassinations, the World Bank's Aceh Conflict Monitoring unit said in a report on its Web site.

### **Cambodian stock exchange deal signed**

**The Phnom Penh Post, 24 March 2009**

The Cambodian government and the Korea Exchange (KRX) signed their long-awaited agreement to set up Cambodia's first stock market on Monday, in what authorities called a "historic event". The signing ceremony was originally slated for February 19, but the KRX chairman was unable to attend, citing health problems.

### **Delegates choosing new leaders in Malaysia**

**International Herald Tribune, 24 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: Delegates of Malaysia's governing party gathered Tuesday to choose new leaders, the biggest revamping of leadership in decades and an attempt to recover from a humiliating election defeat of the old guard a year ago. Hundreds of members of the United Malays National Organization streamed into a conference center next to the party's headquarters to register for the five-day congress, which opened Tuesday.

### **Indonesia seeks 20 years for terror suspect**

**International Herald Tribune, 24 March 2009**

JAKARTA, Indonesia: A Singaporean terror suspect accused of planning and carrying out several attacks in Indonesia deserves to spend the next 20 years in jail, prosecutors said Tuesday. Mohammad Hasan bin Saynudin, believed to be a key member of the Southeast Asian terror network Jemaah Islamiyah, has admitted to many crimes, including helping mastermind a foiled plot to hijack a Russian Aeroflot plane and crash it into the terminal at Singapore's international airport in 2001. Prosecutors were focusing on his activities in Indonesia as he appeared in South Jakarta District Court on Tuesday to hear prosecutors' sentencing recommendations.

### **India to help Indonesia set up its first commodity exchange**

**The Financial Express, 24 March 2009**

New Delhi: India, with around a decade long experience in successfully running commodity exchanges, has offered to help Indonesia in setting up its first such bourse. The move is part of the proposed India-Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), for which the talks are scheduled to begin by this year-end. The plan, being chalked out by a Joint Study Group that is finalising the CEPA text, is to ask commodity market regulator the Forward Markets Commission (FMC) and leading commodity exchanges like National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) and Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) to have discussions with Indonesian authorities and companies in facilitating the setting up of comexes.

### **Arroyo says 41,000 Philippine jobs lost to crisis**

**Hindustan Times, 24 March 2009**

At least 41,000 people in the Philippines have lost their jobs amid the global downturn, President Gloria Arroyo said on Tuesday. The number includes overseas-based contract workers sent home from recession-hit host economies as well as employees in local factories reeling from slumping global demand, she said in an interview on government radio. The total was up 6,000 from figures released by the labour department earlier this month.

### **17 Filipinos on vessel seized off Somalia: Govt**

**Hindustan Times, 24 March 2009**

Seventeen Filipinos are among 24 crewmen seized by Somali pirates aboard a Greek bulk carrier late last week, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said on Tuesday. The pirates hijacked the St. Vincent-flagged MV Titan in the Gulf of Aden on March 19. Three Greek crewmen, three Romanians and a Ukrainian were also seized. The incident brings to 71 the total number of Filipino sailors being held by Somali pirates, the department said in a statement.

### **Lawmakers debate law on self-defence forces**

**Viet Nam News, 25 March 2009**

HA NOI: The National Assembly Standing Committee yesterday discussed the draft Law on Militiamen and Self Defence Forces. According to Minister of National Defence Phung Quang Thanh, the law would aim to build strong militiamen and self defence forces, and to ensure that every Party cell, organisation and locality would have these units. The draft law also had a regulation to build militias and self defence forces in enterprises.

### **BoT: Economic crisis not too severe**

**Bangkok Post, 25 March 2009**

Bank of Thailand (BoT) governor Tarisa Watanagase said the damage to the country's economy this year will not be as serious as predicted. The central bank, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, would revise the gross domestic product (GDP) growth more frequently this year due to the continual economic changes, she said on Wednesday. Thailand would likely encounter substantial challenges during the remaining months of 2009, but they would be less severe than initially forecast. "The BoT forecast is that GDP growth in 2009 will range from zero to two per cent, but more revisions will have to be made as other economic figures are changing frequently," said Mrs Tarisa.

### **ASEAN to ink investment pacts with China, Korea**

**The Jakarta Post, 25 March 2009**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) may soon ink investment pacts with China and South Korea to boost economic integration. The pacts are part of a series of deals under ASEAN's free trade agreements (FTA) signed with China in 2005, and South Korea in 2006. The pact with China could be signed next month in Thailand during the ASEAN meeting with China, South Korea and Japan, an official from the Jakarta ASEAN Secretariat, Lim Chze Cheen, told The Jakarta Post on Tuesday. The deal with China was aimed at opening up both markets to investment flowing either from China or other ASEAN member countries, Cheen said.

### **Nike to cut back on production in China, Vietnam**

**International Herald Tribune, 25 March 2009**

SAN FRANCISCO: Nike plans to halt its production at three shoe factories in China and one in Vietnam as crumbling consumer demand forces it to curtail output and streamline its supply chain. The move comes as manufacturers, reeling from a worldwide consumer-spending slowdown, shutter plants in Asia, lay off workers or reduce orders, devastating a region that has long played the role of manufacturing base for Western markets.

### **Bomb blast misses Philippine passenger bus**

**Hindustan Times, 25 March 2009**

A roadside bomb went off about 10 seconds after a passenger bus passed by early Tuesday in the southern Philippines, the latest attack believed staged by an extortion gang led by former Muslim rebels, police said. Cotabato city police chief Willy Dangane said no one was hurt when the homemade bomb, fashioned from a mortar shell and placed in a cardboard box on the side of the road near a rice field, was triggered by a cell phone just after the bus went by with about 40 people on board. A bomb hurled into the bus company's terminal in Cotabato early on Sunday damaged two buses but caused no injuries. Another explosion late on Sunday in nearby Kidapawan city wounded nine people and damaged a pedestrian overpass.

### **SIAEC inks Gulf Air deal**

**The Straits Times, 26 March 2009**

Amid troubling times for the aviation industry, SIA Engineering has clinched one of its biggest deals to date. The Singapore Airlines (SIA) subsidiary on Thursday signed a US\$80 million three-year contract to maintain 29 Airbus jets for Gulf Air. SIAEC will also take care of the airline's entire maintenance planning and scheduling.

Under the deal, the Singapore firm will also provide maintenance facilities for another 35 Airbus jets due to be delivered to Gulf Air over the next few years.

### **Barun Roy: Little Singapore?**

**Business Standard, 26 March 2009**

If Indonesia can keep up its political will, we're going to see a new business centre emerge in Asia. One could perhaps call it the slowest-moving development project in Asia, but it's finally ready for take-off. Last January, ending four decades of foot-dragging, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono officially launched the island of Batam and its two sisters, Bintan and Karimun (BBK), in the Riau Archipelago, as a free-trade zone that, he hopes, would one day emerge as Indonesia's own Singapore.

### **Thaksin supporters protest against Thailand govt**

**The Times of India, 26 March 2009**

BANGKOK: Thousands of red-shirted protesters massed in Bangkok on Thursday for the latest in a series of rallies aimed at toppling the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. Police said 18,000 red-clad supporters of former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted in a 2006 coup, had gathered at a downtown parade ground and would march on the seat of government later in the day. Loyalists of Thaksin, known as the "Red Shirts," have surrounded Abhisit's offices several times since he came to power in December, but the British-born leader has rejected their demand for snap elections.

### **'Unknown' Najib ready to be Malaysian PM**

### **The Times of India, 26 March 2009**

KUALA LUMPUR: Najib Razak, who is set to be Malaysia's sixth prime minister, has been in parliament for over 30 years, yet outside of a close coterie of friends and family he is an enigma. On Thursday, the 55-year old who is the son of Malaysia's second premier is to be endorsed as the leader of the United Malays National Organisation, the main party in the National Front coalition that has ruled the country for 51 years. The position effectively guarantees him leadership of the country as well.

### **Further Thai troop incursions in Veal Antri**

#### **The Phnom Penh Post, 27 March 2009**

A Group of 30 Thai soldiers withdrew Thursday from Veal Antri near Preah Vihear temple just four hours after crossing the disputed border, an officer with the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) told the Post. That followed an incident on Wednesday when military officials said about 100 Thai soldiers crossed into Cambodian territory before heading back to Thailand. "Our soldiers urged them to go back, and they finally left at midday," Khim Eung, an officer in RCAF's Brigade 8, said, referring to Thursday's incident.

### **\$68m of fake goods destroyed**

#### **The Straits Times, 27 March 2009**

BANGKOK: Thai authorities destroyed more than US\$45 million (S\$68 million) worth of counterfeit goods on Friday, in a bid to demonstrate the government's strong stance on fake merchandise. More than one million illegally produced items including 'designer' cosmetics and clothing, and CD and DVD copies, had been seized during about 1,200 criminal investigations, an official statement said

### **Philippines braces for lower growth**

#### **The Manila Times, 27 March 2009**

A sharp contraction in Philippine exports caused by the global financial crisis could dampen economic growth this year, according to the United Nations Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific (Unescap). In a report titled "Addressing Triple Threats to Development," the UN agency said that the Philippine economy, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP), is expected to grow by no more than 3 percent this year, which is lower compared to the government's forecast of between 3.7 percent and 4.9 percent.

### **Regional fund on agenda**

#### **Bangkok Post, 27 March 2009**

Asean finance ministers will meet in Thailand next month to consider establishing a new fund to invest in infrastructure programmes across the region. The 13th Asean Finance Ministers' Meeting, to be held from April 6-9 in Pattaya, will hold talks on establishing an Asean Infrastructure Financing Mechanism to help strengthen the region's basic infrastructure. Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij said this would include rail networks and port facilities to support regional trade and economic development.

### **State-backed road projects to soon provide 600,000 new jobs**

#### **The Jakarta Post, 27 March 2009**

The Public Works Ministry expects 605,000 new jobs could be quickly created by building

highways financed by the state budget."Originally, we predicted the acceleration of national road development would absorb 550,000 new workers. But if we add the stimulus factor ... we can have another 55,000 workers," the ministry's director general for highways Hermanto Dardak said on Wednesday."The stimulus package for road development amounting to Rp 1.7 trillion (US\$195 million) will add to our existing Rp 18.7 trillion for roads. We have submitted the project proposal to the Finance Ministry and hopefully they can disburse the package as soon as possible," he said.