

Hindustan Times, 1 September 2008

Thai prime minister seeks Parliament's help

BANGKOK: Thailand's prime minister on Sunday admitted his government has failed to stop growing anti-government protests and urged Parliament to help resolve the spiraling political crisis. Samak mixed defiance with uncharacteristic deference during his weekly television programme just hours ahead of an emergency parliamentary session he called in hopes of finding a political solution to what he described as Thailand's "deteriorating situation."

International Herald Tribune, 1 September 2008

Thai government backers take to streets

BANGKOK: Thailand's political crisis entered a more delicate and volatile phase on Sunday when government supporters took to the streets as a counterweight to the antigovernment protesters who have occupied the prime minister's compound for almost a week. A small minority of demonstrators on both sides were armed with sticks and golf clubs, heightening fears of violence between the groups, which were separated by only a few hundred yards.

The Hindu, 1 September 2008

Looking eastwards for trade

After six years of protracted negotiations, the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has finally clinched a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India. The deal was done at last week's annual meeting of Economic Ministers in Singapore and the finer details will be worked out at the official level before its formal acceptance by the leaders at the Bangkok summit scheduled for December. There has been tough bargaining ahead of the settlement, and the Indian industry may well feel New Delhi has conceded more ground than it has gained from the ASEAN negotiators.

Bangkok Post, 1 September 2008

Master plan boosts role of Thai lenders

BANGKOK: The second financial master plan, which establishes the sector's development strategy from 2009 to 2013, will effectively ensure that at least 60% of the market will be served by Thai financial institutions, according to Chodechai Suwannporn, director of financial policy for the Fiscal Policy Office.

The Manila Times, 1 September 2008

Peace talks near collapse: MILF council meets on pact with Manila

ZAMBOANGA CITY: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) held a crucial meeting Sunday to decide the fate of the peace talks with the Arroyo government. A larger conflict looms in Mindanao, as the government and the rebels stood firm on their respective negotiating positions. The military plans to continue its offensive against the rebels during Ramadan (see related front-page story), and the Palace had decided not to sign a controversial agreement on ancestral domain for the Muslims. On the other hand, the MILF is all but poised to scuttle the peace talks, insisting that the agreement on homeland was already a done deal.

The Times of India, 2 September 2008

Thai PM declares emergency in Bangkok

BANGKOK: Thailand's prime minister declared a state of emergency on Tuesday in Bangkok, calling it the 'softest means available' for restoring order after overnight clashes between government opponents and supporters left one person dead and 43 injured. Under the sweeping powers that give the military the right to restore order, all public gatherings of more than five people are banned and the media is barred from reporting news that "causes panic".

The Indian Express, 2 September 2008

Thai army chief won't use force against protesters

BANGKOK: Thailand's army chief has vowed not to use force against protesters following the prime minister's declaration of emergency rule. Army Commander Gen. Anupong Paochinda told a news conference Tuesday that the military was "on the people's side." He said that if the military

needs to get involved in the country's political crisis they will not have weapons and "will not use force."

The Jakarta Post, 2 September 2008

RI suffers trade deficit on lower commodity prices

JAKARTA: Indonesia's trade balance stood in the red last month- the first time the country has suffered a trade deficit in more than a year- due to a slowdown in exports, according to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS). The country posted a US\$270 million trade deficit in July amid a check in commodity prices, especially crude palm oil (CPO) -- of which Indonesia is the world's largest producer- after a period of rapid growth.

The Straits Times, 2 September 2008

Anwar: No more Bumiputra

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said on Tuesday he would dismantle controversial positive-discrimination policies for Muslim Malays if he seizes power in the multicultural country. He said he would replace the New Economic Policy (NEP) launched in the early 1970s with a system to boost all poor Malaysians, whether they are majority Malays or from the minority Chinese and Indian communities.

The Manila Times, 2 September 2008

Critical MILF caucus on peace talks flops: Military readies major attack

ZAMBOANGA CITY: Muslim rebels failed to reach an agreement on their next move regarding stalled peace talks with the government. The rebels from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) held a caucus over the weekend about the suspended negotiations but fell short of arriving at a consensus.

The Asian Age, 3 September 2008

Central bankers intervene as dollar gains

SINGAPORE: The Central banks in India, Malaysia and elsewhere in Asia defended their weak currencies on Tuesday, but analysts suspected that the South Korean hands-off stance may deter others from standing firmly in the way of their falling currencies. The Bank of Thailand said it had sold dollars to put a floor under the baht, which hit a one-year low of 34.49 per dollar on growing political tensions.

International Herald Tribune, 3 September 2008

Thai leader faces challenges in streets and courts

BANGKOK: Bangkok braced for another day of confrontation on Wednesday in the face of a threat of widespread strikes, and several hundred schools closed in the area near a street protest that had been the scene of violence a day earlier. Labor unions at state enterprises said they were preparing to cut off water, electricity and telephone service to government offices. A threatened transit strike in Bangkok appeared not to have materialized, but a shutdown of much of the country's rail service continued. Thai Airways employees said they would delay some flights.

The Jakarta Post, 3 September 2008

South Korea, Singapore issue Thailand travel advisories

BANGKOK: Singapore and South Korea advised their citizens Tuesday against traveling to Thailand, raising concerns that the ongoing political crisis could damage the country's crucial tourist economy. The advisories follow Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej's decision to impose a state of emergency overnight after clashes between pro- and anti-government protesters left one person dead and dozens injured.

The Straits Times, 3 September 2008

S'pore growth outlook cut

SINGAPORE: The Monetary Authority of Singapore said on Wednesday a survey showed economists expected the city-state to grow 4.2 per cent in 2008, down from the 5.5 per cent predicted

in an earlier poll. The lower growth prediction comes amid signs of an economic slowdown after a tumble in key exports over the last few months, particularly to US and other industrialised economies. Economists had trimmed the growth outlook to 5.5 per cent from 5.6 per cent in the previous survey released in June.

The Straits Times, 3 September 2008

Governor shot in Manila

MANILA: The governor of a remote Philippine province and his driver were shot and wounded in a pre-dawn attack in Manila on Wednesday, police said. Gunmen attacked Teleforo Castillejos from the northern island province of Batanes while he was travelling in a car in the capital with his 21-year-old son, after first tailing them in another vehicle, police said.

The Times of India, 4 September 2008

Thai PM refuses to resign despite growing crisis

BANGKOK: Embattled Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej called the political crisis in Thailand a shameful embarrassment for the country but vowed not to resign or dissolve Parliament, saying Thursday it was his job to protect democracy.

International Herald Tribune, 4 September 2008

Philippines dissolves panel in talks with rebels

MANILA: The Philippine government on Wednesday disbanded a panel of negotiators engaged in Malaysian-brokered peace talks with Muslim guerrillas, suspending a yearslong peace process following fresh fighting in the country's south. But President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her key aides stressed that the government was not permanently abandoning the idea of peace talks. Instead, they will seek a new approach that involves wider consultations with affected communities and a promise by the rebels to disarm, they said.

Bangkok Post, 4 September 2008

Government reels as Tej hands in his resignation

BANGKOK: Foreign Minister Tej Bunnag tendered his resignation letter yesterday a move which could accelerate the fall of the government. Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej plans to go on national radio at 7.30am today to talk about the political situation, according to a reliable source. Diplomatic sources said Mr Tej quit because he was upset with the political events of the past several days, during which a state of emergency was declared in Bangkok after a bloody clash between supporters of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and members of the United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) early Tuesday morning.

The Manila Times, 4 September 2008

Rebels vow to continue fighting manila

ZAMBOANGA CITY: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) vowed to press its separatist campaign against the government after President Gloria Arroyo on Wednesday dissolved Manila's panel negotiating peace with the liberation front, the Philippines' largest Muslim rebel group. □??If the peace talks with the Philippine government fail, then we have no recourse but to continue with our armed struggle,□?? Mohagher Iqbal, the chief MILF peace negotiator, told The Manila Times later on Wednesday.

Viet Nam News, 4 September 2008

Viet Nam, Lao youth talk on traditional bilateral relations

HCM CITY: Sixty young delegates from Laos arrived in HCM City on Monday to attend the Viet Nam-Laos Youth Friendship Meeting for 2008, which began the same day. The meeting will run until next Monday as part of a comprehensive co-operation programme between Viet Nam's Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union and the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union.

The Indian Express, 5 September 2008

Thailand plans to hold referendum to end crisis

BANGKOK: After rejecting calls to quit, embattled Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej said on Thursday that Thailand plans to hold a national referendum to end the political crisis over a street campaign against the government. Analysts said the plan appeared to be a tactic to buy time and predicted that uncertainty was likely to persist, even though the dispute is centered on a Bangkok-based political elite and most Thais live in the countryside, where Samak has wide support.

The Economic Times, 5 September 2008

Vietnam aims to limit 2008 inflation at 25 pc -govt

HANOI: Vietnam, which has been grappling with soaring inflation, aims to limit the rise in consumer prices for the whole year to 25 per cent, the government said. Consumer prices in the Southeast Asian country of 86.5 million people, jumped 28.3 per cent last month from a year ago, mainly due to a spike in food and fuel prices.

The Economic Times, 5 September 2008

India eases rice export curbs, Thai sales may dip

NEW DELHI: India eased curbs on exports of premium rice to allow shipments of an estimated 1 million tonnes of the staple, becoming one of the last countries to relax trade restrictions that had lifted world prices to record highs. The world's second-largest producer has allowed exports of the aromatic, long-grained Pusa-1121 grade from Oct. 15 - a move expected to soothe supply concerns in the market and crimp sales from Thailand, the world's top exporter, by 15 per cent next year.

The Jakarta Post, 5 September 2008

China, Singapore conclude talks on free trade pact

SHANGHAI: China and Singapore have wrapped up negotiations on a free-trade accord, with the formal agreement due to be signed in October, the two governments say. The final round of talks, led by Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan and Singaporean Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng, finished Thursday in the northern Chinese city of Tianjin, the Chinese and Singaporean trade ministries said in statements seen Friday on their Web sites.

The Jakarta Post, 5 September 2008

RI not to recognize Georgia breakaways

JAKARTA: Indonesia would not follow suit with Russia in recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two pro-Moscow regions of Georgia that asserted their independence after waves of violence with their former state. Foreign Ministry's spokesperson Teuku Faizasyah said recognition of the two breakaway regions would be almost impossible, citing Indonesia's foreign cause to uphold a respect for territorial sovereignty.

The Asian Age, 8 September 2008

No sign Suu Kyi on hungerstrike: Junta

RANGOON: A Burma junta official said on Sunday there is "no indication" that detained Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is on a hungerstrike but implied the government has not sent anyone to make sure. The 63-year-old Suu Kyi has refused daily food deliveries to her home for about three weeks to protest her ongoing detention, according to her political party, which has evaded questions of whether she is on a hungerstrike.

International Herald Tribune, 8 September 2008

Landslides leave at least 11 dead in Philippines

MANILA: Two landslides triggered by heavy rains buried more than 20 houses in a remote gold-mining village in the southern Philippines, leaving at least 11 people dead and 16 others missing, officials said Sunday. Small stone houses and huts at the foot of the mountain village of Masara were destroyed Saturday by falling mud and rocks, killing six villagers and injuring 17 others. Another landslide struck the village early Sunday, killing five more people.

The Jakarta Post, 8 September 2008

Vietnam discovers mass grave of communist soldiers

HANOI: A military official says authorities in Vietnam's Central Highlands have discovered a mass grave containing 22 sets of remains of communist soldiers killed during the Vietnam War. Lieut. Col. Nguyen Tien Lam of the provincial military command says it took an excavation team of 12 soldiers five days to recover the remains in Kon Tum province. He said Monday that the remains were discovered by a resident who was digging the foundation for a house.

The Jakarta Post, 8 September 2008

RI demands OZ, NZ open up service markets under FTA

Indonesia has proposed the liberalization of professional and service sectors in Australia and New Zealand under the free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries and ASEAN members. Gusmardi Bustami, Trade Ministry director general for international trade cooperation, said the government had asked the Australian and New Zealand governments to open up their service and professional sectors. "We demand liberalization of the service sector, including finance, banking and the professional sectors such as accountancy, nursery and construction," he said over the weekend.

Bangkok Post, 8 September 2008

Another coup is possible, says close aide to the CNS

BANGKOK: Another military coup is possible if the political strife lasts much longer, says a former close aide to people behind the 2006 coup. While stressing that the present stand-off should be tackled through political means, Gen Somjet Boonthanom, the chief adviser to the defence permanent secretary's office, said military intervention may be necessary if all other means failed.

The Economic Times, 9 September 2008

HSBC, StanChart to open Vietnam banks

HANOI: Two European banks, HSBC Holdings Plc and Standard Chartered Plc have won approval to be the first foreign banks to open wholly-owned units in Vietnam, as the communist-run state opens up more to foreign investment. HSBC, Europe's largest bank which first arrived in Vietnam in 1870, said in a statement it would headquarter its Vietnam-based bank in Ho Chi Minh City, the country's commercial centre.

International Herald Tribune, 9 September 2008

Malaysian opposition denounces lawmakers' 'study trip'

KUALA LUMPUR: More than three dozen government lawmakers flew out of the country Monday in a hastily arranged "study trip" that appeared to be an effort by the ruling coalition to prevent defections to the opposition. The trip to Taiwan, ostensibly to study farming techniques, was the latest sign of fragility inside the Barisan National, or National Front, the coalition that has governed Malaysia without interruption since independence from Britain 51 years ago, but which is undergoing a leadership crisis and internal turmoil.

The Jakarta Post, 9 September 2008

Ethnic cracks widen in Malaysia's ruling coalition

Malaysia's governing coalition sought to defuse a racial row Tuesday after a Malay official made a stunning outburst by warning the ethnic Chinese minority not to become greedy for political and economic power. Ahmad Ismail, a district chief in the United Malays National Organization ruling party, claimed that the Malay majority was losing patience with minorities, particularly ethnic Chinese politicians.

The Jakarta Post, 9 September 2008

Businesses applaud new income tax law

JAKARTA: Businesses have praised the newly endorsed income tax law, saying it will boost the competitiveness of Indonesia's economy amid tougher global competition. The House of Representatives endorsed last week the income tax law in a plenary session, with lawmakers boasting it is one of the most business-friendly laws they have ever enacted. "The (new) income tax law is in line with businesspeople's aspirations. It will promote a favorable investment climate," M.S. Hidayat, chairman of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kadin), said last Friday.

Viet Nam News, 9 September 2008

UN rep voices VN support for peaceful conflict settlements

NEW YORK: Viet Nam pursues a foreign policy for peace, stability, co-operation and development, and supports efforts towards peaceful settlement of conflicts, said Vietnamese Ambassador Le Luong Minh. At a plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on Friday, Ambassador Minh said Viet Nam welcomed UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report on the activities of the United Nations system in implementing the Global Strategy.

The Asian Age, 10 September 2008

Thai PM, Cabinet forced to quit over cooking show

BANGKOK: Thailand's Prime Minister was forced to resign along with his Cabinet on Tuesday after the constitutional court ruled that he had violated the Constitution by hosting TV cooking shows. His supporters vowed to bring him back to power, indicating that Thailand is still not free from its deep political crisis that has virtually paralysed the government, spooked the financial markets and scared away tourists.

The Economic Times, 10 September 2008

FTA in hand, how far are India & ASEAN from a CEPA?

NEW DELHI: While the negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA) in goods between India and the ASEAN have been successfully concluded, talks on liberalising services-the area which could generate the maximum benefits for India in terms of greater job opportunities and more services exports-is yet to begin. Negotiations on services and investment, which are expected to begin next month and be concluded by the end of next year, will eventually spell out the net gains made by India from the bilateral agreement.

The Jakarta Post, 10 September 2008

RI demands OZ, NZ open up service markets under FTA

JAKARTA: Indonesia has proposed the liberalization of professional and service sectors in Australia and New Zealand under the free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries and ASEAN members. Gusmardi Bustami, Trade Ministry director general for international trade cooperation, said the government had asked the Australian and New Zealand governments to open up their service and professional sectors.

Bangkok Post, 10 September 2008

Samak sacked, but PPP to back him again for PM

BANGKOK: Sacked prime minister Samak Sundaravej has accepted the People Power party's decision to again nominate him to lead the government, high ranking sources in the coalition parties said last night. The Constitution Court yesterday afternoon disqualified Mr Samak from the job of prime minister for violating the constitution by hosting two cooking shows on commercial television.

The Manila Times, 10 September 2008

Palace rules out talks with MILF but not with communists

MANILA: President Gloria Arroyo on Tuesday ruled out any immediate resumption of peace talks with Muslim separatists as fighting in the South of the country threatens to create a humanitarian disaster. She, however, ordered government peace negotiators to continue back-channeling with Maoist rebels who have made □??overtures□?? about possible resumption of formal peace talks between them and the government.

The Asian Age, 11 September 2008

Thai ruling party mulls candidates for next PM

BANGKOK: Thailand's ruling coalition is mulling possible candidates for Prime Minister, a top official said on Wednesday, declining to endorse Mr Samak Sundaravej, who was forced out by a Thai court. The deputy leader of the ruling People Power Party (PPP), Somchai Wongsawat, said

that its members would meet over the next few days to consider their options. A parliamentary vote has been set for Friday. He made the remarks after a key partner in the PPP's six-party coalition warned that returning Mr Sundaravej to the job could deepen the political stalemate in Thailand.

The Economic Times, 11 September 2008

'India-Malaysia trade set to grow'

KUALA LUMPUR: Bilateral trade between Malaysia and India is expected to see an increased growth this year from the \$8.1 billion recorded last year, an official said. For the first six months of the year, bilateral trade between the two countries stood at \$5.2 billion, Makkal Osai Tamil newspaper Thursday quoted B.N. Reddy, Counsellor (Economic and Education) at the Indian High Commission here as saying.

The Jakarta Post, 11 September 2008

Thai army chief seeks end to emergency rule

BANGKOK: Thailand's army chief urged the caretaker government Thursday to lift a state of emergency and backed a proposal to form a government of national unity that would include all the country's parties. "It is time to lift the state of emergency," army commander Gen. Anupong Paochinda told reporters, noting he had conveyed that view to Thailand's interim leadership. "Keeping it in place will damage the country's economy."

Bangkok Post, 11 September 2008

Fitch warns political turmoil could disrupt development: But sovereign credit rating not affected

Political turmoil has not affected Thailand's BBB+ sovereign credit rating, but has raised concern for its continuing economic development, according to Fitch Ratings. James McCormack, Fitch's head of Asia-Pacific sovereign ratings, said prolonged demonstrations by the People's Alliance for Democracy, the court disqualification of the prime minister and pending legal actions against the People Power Party had caused Thailand's political development to grind to a standstill, despite the successful general elections held in December 2007.

The Straits Times, 11 September 2008

M'sia lifts block on websites

PUTRAJAYA: THE government is no longer blocking the access to any websites or blogs in the country, says Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor. He told reporters that the decision was reached at the weekly cabinet meeting yesterday. Datuk Shaziman said that following the decision, the order to restrict access to websites or blogs, including the 'Malaysia Today' news portal, has been withdrawn, effective immediately.

The Times of India, 17 September 2008

Thaksin's brother-in-law elected Thai PM

BANGKOK: Thai lawmakers elected Somchai Wongsawat, a brother-in-law to ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra, as the new prime minister Wednesday despite threats from protesters vowing to force him from power. Somchai won more than 60 percent in a vote in parliament, according to a tally.

International Herald Tribune, 17 September 2008

Malaysian opposition leader seeks peaceful transition

BANGKOK: Malaysia's insurgent opposition leader, Anwar Ibrahim, missed a self-imposed deadline Tuesday to bring down the government, but asserted that he had secured enough votes to take power. "We want the transition to be peaceful," he said at a news conference. "That's why we are not giving an ultimatum." He said he did not want to name the people who had defected to him from the governing party because publicity could expose them to harassment. But he said he would like to show the list to Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi to persuade him to leave quietly.

The Jakarta Post, 17 September 2008

Majority of Thai lawmakers back Thaksin's in-law

A majority of Thai lawmakers have voted to elect ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's brother-in-law as the new prime minister. With Wednesday's vote still under way in Thailand's lower house of Parliament, more than 236 lawmakers - the required majority - have supported the candidacy of Somchai Wongsawat, 61, for prime minister.

The Jakarta Post, 17 September 2008

Indonesia not a fragile state: Muladi

JAKARTA: Indonesia is not a fragile state like many would assert, despite the highly pluralistic constituents, poor welfare level and occasional political upheavals, National Resilience Institute (Lemhanas) Governor Muladi said Wednesday. "This is the consequence of a full-fledged democracy," Muladi told participants of a seminar on preserving the nation's unity in Jakarta.

The Straits Times, 17 September 2008

US faults Myanmar for drugs

WASHINGTON: President George W. Bush said on Tuesday that Myanmar has 'failed demonstrably' over the last year to meet its international commitments to fight drug production and trafficking. Mr Bush also identified India, Laos, Afghanistan and Pakistan as major drug transit or major illicit drug producing countries.

The Asian Age, 18 September 2008

Malaysia PM may resign before 2010

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's Prime Minister, facing a resurgent opposition and rebellious colleagues in the ruling party, said on Wednesday he may hand over power to his deputy before the 2010 deadline he set earlier. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi also said he handed over his finance ministry portfolio to his deputy Najib Razak on Wednesday. Mr Abdullah will take the less important defence ministry from Mr Najib.

The Economic Times, 18 September 2008

Singapore's GIC says to explore Morgan Stanley

SINGAPORE: The Government of Singapore Investment Corp, the world's second-biggest sovereign fund, said it will explore investing in Morgan Stanley if it is approached. "GIC explores all opportunities when approached," said Jennifer Lewis, a spokeswoman for the Singapore state fund, said in an email when asked if it is considering an investment in the US investment bank. Morgan Stanley, which saw its stock pummel on Wednesday on worries it may not survive the credit crunch, has held preliminary takeover talks with Wachovia Corp, a person familiar with the situation said.

The Jakarta Post, 18 September 2008

RI, Australia to enhance maritime cooperation

JAKARTA: Indonesia and Australia will soon hold another talks on maritime cooperation aimed at forging the existing close defense ties between the two neighboring states. Indonesian Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono said on Wednesday the talks on maritime cooperation would be high on the agenda of his meeting with his Australian counterpart, Joel Fitzgibbon, here on Thursday.

The Straits Times, 18 September 2008

New Thai PM calls for unity

BANGKOK: Thailand's new prime minister showed his determination to mend political rifts by quickly shaking hands with the opposition leader on Wednesday. But the gesture didn't appease anti-government protesters, who called him unfit for the job because of ties to a disgraced former leader. Many analysts said the negative reaction to Mr Somchai Wongsawat's election by Parliament presaged further turmoil from activists who seized the prime minister's office compound three weeks ago.

Viet Nam News, 18 September 2008

Deputy Premier's visit to Russia ends on high note

MOSCOW: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem's three-day official visit to Russia ended yesterday. During the visit, Khiem met Deputy Speaker of the State Duma Ivan Melnikov and held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. At the talks, Khiem and Lavrov said they highly appreciated the Viet Nam-Russia strategic partnership and agreed that there was great potential for further development of bilateral relations.

The Jakarta Post, 18 September 2008

US slams Malaysia for using harsh law against foes

WASHINGTON: The United States strongly criticized Malaysia's government Thursday for its use of a harsh security law to justify the arrests of opposition figures. U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack referred in a special statement to a possibility that the law might be used again by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's government to quell dissent.

The Times of India, 19 September 2008

Thailand joins Malacca Straits patrol

SINGAPORE: Thailand has joined patrols aimed at securing the Malacca Straits, one of the world's most strategic waterways, Singapore said Thursday. At a ceremony in Bangkok, the defence chief of Thailand signed an agreement formalising his country's participation with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, the city-state's defence ministry said in a statement.

The Jakarta Post, 19 September 2008

'Enslaved' children denied civil rights in Malaysia

JAKARTA: It is 11 a.m. and three Indonesian children -- two boys and a girl -- are busily picking up palm oil seeds that have been dropped by their parents during harvest on a plantation in Sabah, Malaysia. The children on the video were employed with ensuring that no seeds went to waste. One of the two boys, 10-year-old Ramdan, later said he could collect up to six sacks of palm oil seeds in a day, with each sack containing around 50 kilograms. Each sack is worth 1.3 MYR (38 US cents), he added.

The Straits Times, 19 September 2008

Anwar wants debate: PM dismisses his request to hold emergency parliamentary session

KUALA LUMPUR: A defiant Anwar Ibrahim yesterday raised the stakes in his battle for power, demanding that Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi convene an emergency parliamentary session to debate a no-confidence motion against the government. Datuk Seri Abdullah dismissed it outright, telling reporters he had no intention of calling the session.

The Straits Times, 19 September 2008

KL to intro Race Relations Act

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia will draw up a Race Relations Act to safeguard and strengthen ties between the various races, Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday. He said work on the proposed Act, which had been agreed upon by the Cabinet, would be headed by his ministry and the Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage Ministry.

The Manila Times, 19 September 2008

Clashes with MILF killed 200 plus, says Sec. Teodoro

Fighting in southern Philippines has claimed more than 200 lives from the government, rebel and civilian sides since August, according to the Department of National Defense. Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro said Thursday that a total of 35 soldiers and 54 civilians have been killed since the start of the fighting in Mindanao.

The Economic Times, 22 September 2008

US to join budding Asia-Pacific free trade agreement

UNITED NATIONS: The United States has agreed to join Singapore, New Zealand, Chile and Brunei in a free trade agreement which could set the pace for a broader Asia-Pacific free trade area, officials said. US Trade Representative Susan Schwab is expected to announce Washington's

decision to participate in the "Comprehensive Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement" at a meeting Monday with ministers from the four countries on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, the officials said.

The Economic Times, 22 September 2008

Vietnam's rice export deals total 4.1 mn tonnes

HANOI: Vietnam has secured contracts to export 4.1 million tonnes of rice so far this year, or 89 percent of its annual target, and loading would be completed by the end of October, a state-run newspaper reported on Monday. Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai has urged exporters to speed their loading and also seek more contracts in order to ship 4.6 million tonnes this year, the Agriculture Ministry-run Vietnam Agriculture newspaper said.

The Jakarta Post, 22 September 2008

Thai govt, Malay Muslims committed to end conflicts

JAKARTA: Representatives of the Thai government and Muslim communities in the south of the country concluded Sunday a historic two-day talks hosted by the Indonesian government in Bogor, West Java, with a commitment to end the bloody conflicts in the area. The two sides pledged to continue the talks at the same place in November to try to find ways to meet the Thai Muslims' demands for justice, economic development and the right to use the Malay language in their areas.

The Straits Times, 22 September 2008

Border dispute talks to restart

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia and Thailand will restart bilateral negotiations to resolve their 10-week border dispute on Sept 29 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York, national media reported on Monday. Either Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen or Foreign Minister Hor Namhong will fly to New York this week to attend the General Assembly session, Mr Chea Sokhum, deputy secretary-general of the Permanent Organising Commission for National and International Ceremonies, was quoted by China's Xinhua news agency as saying in the Cambodia Daily newspaper.

The Straits Times, 22 September 2008

No plans to repeg ringgit

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's new Finance Minister Najib Razak on Monday dismissed calls for the ringgit currency to be pegged and said the country's economy remained in good shape despite the US financial crisis. 'I wish to categorically state we have no intention to repeg the ringgit,' Datuk Seri Najib told a press conference after a briefing from the finance ministry and central bank on his first day in office. Following Mr Najib's comments, the ringgit retreated from a two-week high it had hit earlier in the day.

The Economic Times, 23 September 2008

Singapore GIC says worst of crisis may not be over

SINGAPORE: The Government of Singapore Investment Corp said on Tuesday the worst of the financial crisis may not be over, but it would continue to scour for opportunistic investments in sectors such as financials. "We should not assume that the worst is over and we continue to be watchful and prudent in our assessment of the economic risks and in our investments," said Deputy Chairman and Executive Director Tony Tan at a news conference for its first annual report.

The Jakarta Post, 23 September 2008

RI denies Turkish dumping allegations

JAKARTA: Trade Minister Mari Elka Pangestu said Indonesia had lodged a protest against Turkish charges that Indonesia had practiced dumping in its rayon and polyester fiber exports to Turkey. "We have told them we objected to their investigation of the alleged dumping practices. We saw there were things against standing procedures and we asked them to heed the matter," the minister said on the sidelines of a working meeting with the House of Representatives (DPR)'s Commission VI, which deals with trade affairs, here on Monday.

Bangkok Post, 23 September 2008

PM confirms cabinet finalised: Democrats, scholars not expecting any surprises

BANGKOK: There will be no surprises from the new cabinet line-up because the quota system of sharing cabinet portfolios among political factions and coalition partners remains a dominant factor, the Democrats and academics said yesterday. They made their remarks as Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat confirmed the line-up has been finalised and said he had tried his best to assemble a cabinet acceptable to the general public.

The Straits Times, 23 September 2008

Handover talks open

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's opposition said on Tuesday it had opened talks with the government via a third party on the current political impasse, a claim denied by the government. The claim came on the day that Mr Anwar Ibrahim's opposition alliance had wanted parliament to be recalled from recess to hold a confidence vote in Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and a day before Mr Anwar was due in court on sodomy charges.

Viet Nam News, 23 September 2008

Inflation rate will be curbed to single digits by 2010: PM Dung

HA NOI: Prime Minister Ngyen Tan Dung has highlighted inflation growth of just 0.18 per cent in September, limiting the nine month consumer price index to 21 per cent, saying Viet Nam will strive to curb inflation to a single digit rate by early 2010. The PM told foreign economists at a discussion held in Ha Noi on Saturday that these achievements were the initial result of the Government's eight-solution package implemented over the last six months.

The Jakarta Post, 26 September 2008

Malaysia's ruling party postpones elections

WASHINGTON: Malaysia's ruling party postponed key elections to choose its leaders, triggering speculation Friday that the increasingly unpopular prime minister will step down within months. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told reporters af