

ABC News, 1 January 2007

More bomb attacks possible: Thai junta chief

Thailand's junta chief has blamed politicians from the country's ousted government for the deadly bombings that rocked Bangkok on New Year's Eve and warned more attacks were possible. "The bombs were regrettable. It was the work of people who lost political power," General Sonthi Boonyaratglin told reporters after a two-hour meeting of the junta.

Myiris, 1 January 2007

Myanmar-India gas pipeline to be shelved

The proposed Rs 85 billion Myanmar-India gas pipeline is on the verge of being shelved as Yangon is likely to opt for an LNG project to exploit gas finds in two blocks and sell it to other countries.

Japan or Korea are the most likely destinations. After finding the bids for selling gas through a pipeline to either China, India or Thailand 'unsatisfactory', state-run Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) called for bids for selling 3.5 million tons per annum of LNG from Daewoo's A-1 and A-3 blocks, early December.

BBC News, 1 January 2007

US to resume Philippine exercises

The move comes after the Philippines handed over a US marine, convicted of rape in the country, into US custody. The US cancelled the annual joint war games after a Manila court remanded Lance Corporal Daniel Smith in jail following his conviction on 4 December. Washington said the decision broke a special bilateral agreement over the treatment of US troops in the country.

Asia Times, 2 January 2007

India's rail-building challenge

India is planning a rail link with Myanmar, which involves constructing the Jiribam-Imphal-Moreh line in the eastern Indian state of Manipur and the Tamu-Kalay-Segyi line in Myanmar, as well as rehabilitating Myanmar's existing Segyi-Chaungu Myohaung line. According to Rail India Technical and Economic Services Ltd, a state-run company that conducted the feasibility study of the proposed freight corridor, the Jiribam-Imphal-Moreh rail link would cost US\$649 million, while the Tamu-Kalay-Segyi link in Myanmar would cost \$296 million. Refurbishing the Segyi-Chungu-Myohaung line has been pegged at \$62.5 million.

Today, 2 January 2007

Ex-Thai PM blames Islamic rebels for Bangkok blasts

Deposed prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra on Tuesday denied involvement with deadly New Year bombings in Bangkok and blamed the attacks on Islamic insurgents from southern Thailand. The military government that ousted Thaksin in September has blamed factions linked to his government for the coordinated bomb blasts that killed three and wounded 38 on New Year's Eve in Bangkok.

Hindustan Times, 2 January 2007

More gas discovered in impoverished Myanmar: report

Myanmar, one of the world's poorest countries and under US and European economic sanctions over human rights abuses and suppression of democracy, is increasingly reliant on revenue from its oil and gas deposits. Energy minister Lun Thi called for the speedy launch of commercial production of the gas, the New Light of Myanmar reported, adding that plans were underway to drill six more wells in block M-9 in 2007. With the new discovery, block M-9 is estimated to contain 8.0 trillion cubic feet of gas, the newspaper said.

Reuters, 2 January 2007

Arroyo justifies transfer of convicted U.S. Marine

A row has broken out in the Philippines over the transfer of a U.S. marine convicted of rape to U.S. custody, but President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo said on Tuesday the move was aimed at preserving bilateral ties. Critics say the transfer of Lance-Corporal Daniel Smith from a Manila jail to the custody of the U.S. embassy on December 29 amounted to contempt of court since no tribunal had

granted the required permission.

Reuters news, 3 January 2007

Singapore growth outperforms in Q4, but set to slow

Singapore's economy strengthened at its fastest pace in a year in the fourth quarter thanks to sales of its manufactured goods, but analysts said growth would slow this year as demand for the island's exports weakens. The economy grew at an annualised rate of 7.6 percent, an advance report based largely on data from October and November showed on Wednesday, topping the median forecast in a Reuters poll of 6.2 percent.

World Politics Watch, 3 January 2007

Myanmar Finds Willing Arms Suppliers in Energy-Hungry Neighbors

In an effort to bolster its armed forces, Myanmar's ruling junta continues to diversify the sources of its military hardware, finding willing suppliers in countries that are eager to gain access to the Southeast Asian nation's abundant energy resources. Although China remains the principal dealer of military equipment to Myanmar, India has recently offered a multi-million dollar military assistance package to the junta's leaders.

The People's Daily, 3 January 2007

Myanmar constitutional national convention to be completed soon: state leader

Myanmar's constitutional national convention, which forms the first step of the country's seven-step political roadmap, will be completed soon, official media quoted Myanmar's second top leader Vice Senior-General Maung Aye as saying Wednesday. Maung Aye, who is vice-chairman of the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), made the remarks when addressing a closing ceremony of the 4th Intake of the Defense Services Institute of Nursing and Paramedical Science Tuesday in the new capital of Nay Pyi Taw, the New Light of Myanmar reported.

Reuters, 3 January 2007

All systems go for delayed Asia summit-Philippines

Leaders from 16 Asian nations have confirmed they will attend a rescheduled summit on the Philippine island of Cebu next week, organisers said on Wednesday, while the military said they saw no security threat to the gathering. The East Asia summit was postponed from December, ostensibly because of concerns over an incoming typhoon. News reports also spoke of warnings from the U.S., British and Australian governments of plans for a terrorist bomb attack.

The Financial Express, 4 January 2007

Ousted Thai PM denies links to Bangkok bombs

Ousted Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra denied suggestions by the military and his army-appointed successor he was linked to New Year's Eve bombs in Bangkok that killed three people and wounded 38. In a letter faxed to media organisations from Beijing, where he is in exile after his removal in a September 19 coup, Thaksin accused the army-appointed government of jumping to conclusions by blaming "groups that have lost political powers". Many Thais have interpreted that as meaning Thaksin. I swear I have never thought of hurting or destroying the happiness of the Thai people or spoiling the credibility of the country for my political goals," he said.

The Asia Times, 4 January 2007

From chaos to order in Cambodia

Historians and political commentators will look back at 2006 as a defining year for Cambodian politics - the year Prime Minister Hun Sen substantially consolidated his own and the ruling Cambodian People's Party's political power and set the country on a more stable political course.

HindustanTimes, 4 January 2007

Myanmar for 'discipline-flourishing democracy': junta

Myanmar's ruling junta is seeking to create a "discipline-flourishing democracy", the military announced on Thursday at a ceremony commemorating the national Independence Day."We are

working for the emergence of discipline-flourishing democracy through National Convention process," announced Myanmar's junta chief Senior General Than Shwe in a written message to the 59th Independence Day celebration held for the first time in Nay Phi Taw, the country's new capital situated about 300 km north of Yangon. Nay Phi Taw Commander Brigadier-General Wai Lwin read out Than Shwe's message during the flag hoisting ceremony at the capital's City Hall Square.

Asia Times, 4 January 2007

Thai bombs expose dangerous new divide

The unprecedented attacks on Bangkok represent a dangerous turn in the country's already tense political situation and provide powerful new justification for the military-led Council for National Security (CNS) military installed government to maintain martial law, augment its security presence and crack down on political dissent across the country.

The Bangkok Post, 5 January 2007

Sonthi goes on TV to deny coup

Sonthi Boonyaratkalin, leader of the Sept 19 coup that ousted the Thaksin Shinawatra government, went on television last night to douse rumours that he would stage a repeat coup. "Why would we do this "We risked our lives in response to the demands of the people. Why would we do it again," he said in an interview with Channel 9 television last night. "We have turned over our powers to the government.

Dawn, 5 January 2007

Muslim militancy gaining strength in Thailand

Three years after a separatist revolution erupted in Thailand's Muslim south, rebel attacks have grown more frequent and gruesome amid signs that young radical Islamists are taking a greater role. Less than a week ago the charred corpses of two teachers were left near a school in Yala, where they were found by police shortly before children would have begun arriving for class. It was part of an escalating saga of mutilations, shootings, bombings and arson despite significant peace-building moves by the new government, put in place after September's military coup.

The Manila Times, 5 January 2007

New terror threat on Asean Summit

Claiming that terrorists are on the final stages of planning attacks, the Canadian Embassy on Thursday advised its nationals against all travel to the central and southern Philippines. The Canadian advisory, posted on the government website (www.geo.international.gc.ca), singled out the province of Cebu, which will host the 12th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Summit from January 11 to 15.

Arab News, 5 January 2007

The Realpolitik of US Marine Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith's Case

The transfer of US Marine Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith, the American soldier convicted of raping on the night of Dec. 29 from Makati City Jail to US custody at the US Embassy is being improperly used by the opposition and leftist groups to attack the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

Channel News Asia, 6 January 2007

ASEAN must make tough decisions to reinvent itself: DPM Jayakumar

ASEAN must take some hard nosed decisions to stay relevant and competitive, or risk being marginalised, says Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Professor S Jayakumar. Professor S Jayakumar is a member of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) tasked to examine how the bloc can be more effective. The 10-member Group has drafted a list of recommendations which will be presented to the leaders at the 12th ASEAN Summit in Cebu next week.

The Jakarta Post, 6 January 2007

RI disagrees on Myanmar draft

After five days on the UN Security Council, Indonesia has asserted its independence by taking issue

with the content of a U.S. draft resolution on Myanmar. Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda expressed dissatisfaction Friday with the draft, which called Myanmar a threat to international security and peace. "The current draft has a nuance of accusation of human rights violations and slow progress toward democracy. We should find more effective ways (than issuing a resolution) to help overcome the problems in Myanmar," he told reporters after holding a ceremony for the ministry's new spokesman.

Inquirer Express, 6 January 2007

US on VFA review: Premature

THE UNITED States does not share the Philippines' position that the Visiting Forces Agreement between the two countries must be reviewed, calling the move premature, a US Embassy spokesman said Friday. Matthew Lussenhop told the INQUIRER.net that the current case of [US Marine] Daniel Smith was still in the judicial system, so any formal review of the VFA would be considered premature. Smith was convicted of raping a Filipina at the Subic Bay Freeport last year and was sentenced to 40 years in prison. His sudden transfer from a local jail to the US Embassy has raised a furor because it was done without a court order although US and Philippine officials justified the move by citing the VFA.

Dawn, 6 January 2007

China upsets ecologists by making Mekong oil-shipping route

The concern by green groups followed a path-breaking journey by two ships up the Mekong River underscoring Beijing's determination to find cheaper, alternative routes of transporting oil to China. On Dec 29, the two vessels arrived at a port in China's south-west province of Yunnan carrying a total of 300 tons of refined oil shipped from a port in Thailand's northern province of Chiang Rai, reports Xinhua, China's state news agency. This journey along the Mekong marked the trial launch of China's oil shipping programme with its South-East Asian partners, it added. Experts say the waterway will serve as an alternative to the Strait of Malacca as a route for oil shipping and help to ensure oil supply to Yunnan and South-West China at large.

The Manila Times, 6 January 2007

Be brave, GMA says as terror alerts rise

Faced with a flurry of new advisories warning of possible terrorist attacks on the January 11-15 12th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Summit, the Philippine government on Friday put on a brave face. With a deep sense of pride and national unity, let us put our best foot forward as the Philippines hosts these historic meetings, President Arroyo said in a speech before defense department and military officials in Camp Aguinaldo.

Hindustan Times, 7 January 2007

India's concerns must be highlighted in FTA: Nath

Ahead of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to the Philippines for the ASEAN summit, India on Sunday said its "sensitivities" should be addressed in the ongoing negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement with the Association of South East Asian Nations. India has certain sensitivities which must be reflected in the ASEAN FTA," Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath said on the sidelines of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conclave in New Delhi.

NDTV, 7 January 2007

Vietnam backs India's civil nuclear quest

India's quest for civil nuclear energy has received support from Vietnam which is seeking to boost the bilateral economic engagement by making it the 'focus' country for 2007. Energy-rich Vietnam is ready to offer oil and gas blocks to India and favours increased investments from this country for which it wants establishment of dialogue mechanism. To tap large potential of trade between the two nations, the South East Asian country is looking for various measures.

Today, 7 January 2007

The heat's off Myanmar at upcoming ASEAN summit

Myanmar, ASEAN's most troublesome member, will likely escape strong pressure to implement democratic reform when the Southeast Asian bloc holds its annual summit this week, analysts say. The nation has long been an embarrassment to the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations thanks to its dismal rights record, as Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi acknowledged less than six months ago. "The situation in Myanmar is impacting upon the image and credibility of ASEAN," he told a meeting of its foreign ministers.

Channel News Asia, 7 January 2007

Philippines military predicts victory over communist guerrillas

Five thousand communist insurgents in the Philippines have been "neutralised" since 2002, the armed forces chief said, predicting victory over the guerrilla movement by 2010. General Hermogenes Esperon said he was confident of a "strategic victory" after military clashes with the insurgents significantly reduced numbers in both the political and fighting arms of the communist movement.

Daily India, 7 January 2007

India has central strategic role in East Asia: Singapore deputy PM

Ahead of the ASEAN summit in Cebu, Philippines next week, Singapore Sunday outlined a 'central strategic and economic role' for India in the construction of a vibrant new East Asia and the emerging regional architecture. 'India has a natural and central place in the emerging East Asian order and has key roles to play to shape the emerging regional architecture,' Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister S. Jayakumar said at the 5th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) that was inaugurated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Dawn, 8 January 2007

Security for Asean summit beefed up

Philippines authorities have ramped up security for this week's summit of Southeast Asian leaders, saying on Sunday a terror attack could not be ruled out although there was no specific threat. After the original gathering last month was postponed at the last minute, ostensibly because of an approaching typhoon, several thousand extra police have been drafted in for security on the resort island of Cebu. Armed forces are reinforcing police in securing the venue, while a raft of other measures, including an air exclusion zone and navy patrols, are also in the operation schedule.

The Australian, 8 January 2007

Coup fears on Bangkok blasts

DEADLY bomb attacks in Bangkok a week ago have rekindled political tensions in Thailand and cast doubt on the ruling junta's promise to restore democracy after a military coup. Analysts have warned the latest instability in Thailand could prompt the military to delay the drafting of a new constitution and postpone elections that had been promised for October. "If the bombings were a one-off, they can regain control and get their act back together. Then the constitution timetable is still intact," political analyst Panitan Wattanayagorn said. "But obviously if the bomb threats continue, then the military might be forced to do something more drastic, like another coup."

The Nation, 8 January 2007

What lies ahead for Burma's cease-fires:

Between 1989 and 1995, 20-plus armed ethnic groups agreed cease-fires with the Burmese military government. This year, these agreements are likely to come under renewed pressure. Since the fall of ex-prime minister Khin Nyunt in October 2004, the situation for most cease-fire groups has deteriorated, as they no longer have access to the centre of power in Burma. The situation is particularly difficult for groups such as the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), which have publicly challenged the government - including by endorsing Burma's inclusion on the UN Security Council agenda.

The Age, 8 January 2007

Asian leaders to talk security at summit

Leaders of 16 Asian nations aim to seal agreements on counter-terrorism, energy and trade this week at a summit in the central Philippines clouded by bomb threats and regional insecurity.

Hindustan Times, 8 January 2007

Manmohan's agenda for ASEAN Summit

India's Look East policy revolving around deepening economic engagement with the region will get a decisive boost at the 5th India-ASEAN summit on January 14 and the second East Asia summit to be held next day. Manmohan Singh flies to Cebu island city in the Philippines to attend the 5th India-ASEAN summit at which the two sides will review their burgeoning relations encompassing diverse areas, including trade, technology and cultural ties. A declaration on energy security with emphasis on clean energy-efficient technologies is expected at the end of the East Asia Summit - a forum comprising 10 Association of South-East Asian Nations, China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand.

The Star, 9 January 2007

U.N.'s Ban urges Myanmar to free political prisoners

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged Myanmar on Monday to release all political prisoners, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Ban, a South Korean, welcomed last week's announcement from the country's ruling military junta that it had freed 40 political prisoners among 2,831 felons released. "The secretary-general urges the Myanmar authorities to go beyond this first step by releasing all other political prisoners in the country, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and by making further concrete progress on all of the issues raised in the context of his good offices," said Ban's spokeswoman Michele Montas.

Asia Times, 9 January 2007

Sparks fly as China moves oil up Mekong

Energy-hungry China has started to use the Mekong River as a new oil-shipping route, raising new environmental concerns that accidental spills could adversely affect the livelihoods of nearly 60 million downstream river dwellers and eventually evolve into a bone of diplomatic contention between Southeast Asian countries and China. The maiden journey on December 29 of two Chinese ships carrying oil up the Mekong underscored Beijing's steadfast determination to find alternative routes for transporting the oil and gas it imports from the Middle East. The two vessels arrived at a port in China's southwestern province of Yunnan carrying a total of 300 tons of refined oil, which was shipped from a port in Thailand's northern province of Chiang Rai, according to Xinhua, China's state news agency.

The Manila Times, 9 January 2007

RP to keep Asean Summit guests safe, says GMA

PRESIDENT Arroyo assured her fellow Asian leaders on Monday that security was in place to prevent attacks during their summit in central Cebu City this week. "Our fight against terror goes hand in hand with the global and regional effort", Mrs. Arroyo said in a statement. "And as we face the Asean Summit, we would like to assure all our allies in the East Asia and beyond that the Filipino soldiery and people are on watch every hour of the day, determined to do their share to defeat terror for a more secure and safer world", she said.

Financial Times, 9 January 2007

Foreigners seek Thai investment rethink

Thailand's overseas business community on Monday urged the military-installed government to rethink revisions to foreign investment laws, saying it was "gravely concerned" about the effects on current and potential investors. However, Krik-krai Jirapaet, commerce minister, said the cabinet would address the possible changes on Tuesday in spite of objections both from foreign business groups and Thailand's main trading partners. He also rebuffed overseas business groups for speaking out publicly.

Online Opinion, 9 January 2007

Cambodia: the changing political land scape

Historians and political commentators will look back at 2006 as a defining year for Cambodian politics - as the year that changed the political landscape in a manner that few had anticipated. And yet the changes were long in the offing and, in hindsight, there was a clear strategy that escaped scrutiny given all the usual distractions - the never ending infighting, the ever present treachery, the underlying deviousness and the debilitating one-upmanship that have been characteristic of Cambodian politics since the UN sponsored elections of 1993.

Voice of America, 9 January 2007

ASEAN Summit to Tackle Tough Issues, From Terrorism to North Korea

Terrorism, free trade and North Korea are just a few of the issues expected to come up at the summit of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Cebu, in the Philippines, this week. As Douglas Bakshian in Manila reports, the regional leaders at the event, which was rescheduled from December, also must consider a new more formal structure for the organization.

The Hindu, 10 January 2007

Energy Security to come up during Manmohan's visit

Energy security and development of an East-West economic corridor are expected to come under special focus during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's three-day visit to the Philippines from February 13. Singh will attend the fifth India-ASEAN Summit and the second East Asia Summit to be held on February 14 and 15 in the Philippine city of Cebu. The two Summits, scheduled for last month, were deferred due to a typhoon threat. Ahead of Singh's visit, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee will reach Cebu today for the India-ASEAN meeting of Foreign Ministers, during which cooperation on a range of areas like information technology and entrepreneurship will be discussed.

The Tribune, 10 January 2007

Singapore Stock Exchange eyes stake in BSE

The Bombay Stock Exchange, which is currently in the process of finalising a strategic partner as per its demutualisation scheme, is in talks with Singapore's stock exchange to explore various business opportunities together. The Singapore Exchange (SGX) said in a statement today that it was "in preliminary discussions with the BSE on a number of possibilities".

The Manila Times, 10 January 2007

40 years on, the Asean reviews itself

NOT security threats or bad weather will weigh on the minds of many of the delegates to the 12th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Summit but criticisms that the group is becoming irrelevant for these times or that the association is unprepared to renew itself as it approaches its 40th year. The criticisms have risen over the years because of a perception that the Asean has become an old boys' club where members meet for social niceties despite its high-sounding agenda. No rules legally bind the association. It operates on consensus.

BBC News, 10 January 2007

US issues Burma resolution to UN

The US has presented a draft resolution to the UN Security Council, calling on Burma to ease repression and free opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Washington says the situation in Burma constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Burma has been under the control of a military government for 40 years.

The Nation, 10 January 2007

Thai bourse says 'foreigner' definition changes will not have a major effect

"The adjustment of definition of "foreigner" in applying the Foreign Business Act B.E. 2542 (1999) will not affect most listed firms, SET President Patareeya Benjapolchai said after a preliminary study of public companies. This is because most listed firms are in the Act's List 3, which will not be affected. About 15 businesses classified as being in Lists 1 and 2 of the Act may have to adjust their

shareholdings to meet the revised definition.

The Financial Express, 11 January 2007

Asean Blues

A head of the Asean summit later this week in the Philippines, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told India Inc that it can no longer seek excessive protection through tariffs and must prepare for the brave new world of global integration. Even though India's trade flows to the Asia-Pacific have been booming of late, even surpassing the value of its trade with the US and western Europe, the country needs to develop greater self-confidence to engage with this region. To be sure, this has a lot to do with the protectionist instincts of India Inc, among other factors.

The Star, 11 January 2007

Vietnam joins the World Trade Organization

Nearly 32 years after Vietnam's communists chased U.S. forces from their soil, the southeast Asian nation joined the capitalist club as the World Trade Organization's 150th member on Thursday, signaling its emergence as one of the world's fastest-growing economies. "Welcome, Bienvenue, Bienvenido, Vietnam" read a giant blue banner across the across the WTO's Geneva headquarters. Entry for Vietnam, whose economy has grown by an average of more than 7 percent for the last decade, comes as good news for the commerce body, which is embarking on an uncertain year as global free trade talks remain suspended and countries appear unlikely to agree on a deal.

Hindustan Times, 12 January 2007

Beyond India's borders

Following the inhuman ethnic cleansing against non-Assamese by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the Indian Army has begun counter-insurgency operations in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This is a placebo that bypasses the real cancer breeding outside India's borders. While discrimination, underdevelopment and unemployment in Assam are serious internal failures of the Indian government that explain the origins and early legitimacy of ULFA in the 1980s, the current savagery of this discredited terrorist group owes to India's failed foreign policy towards Myanmar (Burma).

International Herald Tribune, 12 January 2007

U.S. negotiator says at least 2 more rounds of talks needed to reach FTA with Malaysia

The U.S. and Malaysia need at least two more rounds of negotiations to overcome obstacles and reach a free trade agreement, a top American trade negotiator said Friday. Progress has been made in talks this week in San Francisco, with constructive discussions on sticky issues such as greater access to Malaysia's protected financial services and auto sector, Barbara Weisel, who is leading the U.S. team, told reporters here via videoconference. But both governments must find creative ways to resolve differences, she said.

Asia Times, 12 January 2007

Vietnam's WTO hopes and dreams

After nearly 11 years of protracted negotiations and intense horse-trading with the United States, Vietnam on Thursday officially became the 150th member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), opening the way for more foreign trade and investment to speed the communist country's capitalist transformation. Vietnam's Communist Party leaders have stutter-stepped toward a market economy since the mid-1980s, at times encouraging foreign investors, at others driving them away with xenophobic regulations and restrictions. Over the past three years, leading up to final WTO negotiations, the pace of foreign-friendly reforms has increased.

The Hindu, 12 January 2007

India and Asean set to focus on East Asia

AS PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh prepares to attend another summit of leaders of Asean+, there appears to be a convergence of interests between India and South East Asia. At the start more than a decade ago, India was looking at just Singapore. Then, the Look East policy took shape and

New Delhi began to engage the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean). Now both India and ASEAN appear keen on working towards an East Asian community, perhaps as a prelude to a larger Asian regional grouping. Even if this takes time, the links being forged by India and Asean with East Asia can certainly be strengthened and provided an institutional framework. Already, India was an invitee at the East Asian summit.

The Hindu, 13 January 2007

India-ASEAN Ministers agree to enhance ties

The Foreign Ministers of India and the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have agreed to "consider joint flagship projects" that would tap "Indian expertise" in science and technology and the organisation's complementary strengths. The accord, reached at the annual ministerial meeting of the two sides on Thursday, was followed by the decision of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) on Friday to elect India to chair this forum. Both these meetings were held in Cebu (The Philippines) ahead of the ASEAN-India summit and the East Asia Summit (EAS) at the same place on Sunday and Monday respectively. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will attend these summits.

Hindustan Times, 13 January 2007

India, ASEAN to consider new economic Initiatives: PM

India and ASEAN will consider "new initiatives" to accelerate the process of economic engagement in the region, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Saturday. Singh, who left on a three-day visit to Philippines city of Cebu to attend the India-ASEAN and East Asia summits, said he would also explore steps both sides can take to hasten the conclusion of the India-ASEAN free trade agreement, "Our participation in both these summits is a reflection of the increasing significance of the eastern orientation of India's foreign policy and our quest for closer engagement with countries of East Asia," he said. The Prime Minister said that the India-ASEAN free trade agreement was an "important initiative" to promote greater economic synergy in the Asian region.

Financial Express, 13 January 2007

Trade dominates Asean summit; China key to regional agreement

Trade issues dominated talks between 16 foreign ministers from across Asia meeting in the Philippines on Friday, with Australia saying China is the key to the success of a regional trading bloc. Foreign ministers met in the Shangri-La resort in the central Philippine city of Cebu in a bid to agree on freer trade among the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations and China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Intra-Asean trade totals \$306 billion. China's trade with the group, which includes Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, has tripled in the five years to 2005 to \$113 billion. It now accounts for 9.3% of trade conducted by Asean. "Bilateral and trade negotiations have dominated discussions," Australian trade minister Warren Truss said in an interview. "Still, China is the key to any regional discussion for an agreement that enhances freer and fairer trade. It has become the dominant player."

The Times of India, 13 January 2007

Protestors take to streets at ASEAN venue

Some 400 demonstrators shouting anti-US slogans gathered on Saturday in the central Philippines resort of Cebu as leaders of 10 Southeast Asian nations launched their annual summit. "US out of Southeast Asia" read one banner carried by chanting protesters in the centre of Cebu City, some miles away from the heavily guarded summit venue on Mactan island. "US number one terrorist!" chanted the demonstrators, many of them from the leftist Bayan Muna party headed by a former communist guerrilla leader

The Star, 13 January 2007

China, Russia cast rare veto against U.S. on Myanmar

China and Russia on Friday vetoed a U.S. resolution calling on Myanmar's military junta to stop persecution of minority and opposition groups, killing the measure in the U.N. Security Council. The vote was 9-3 in favor of the resolution, with three abstentions. But two of the negative votes came

from permanent members with veto rights.

The Manila Times, 13 January 2007

Manila pushes for BIMP-EAGA tack

Philippines urged fellow Asean member-countries to strengthen support for sub-regional growth areas such as the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asean Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) stressing that this is the key to sustain overall growth in Southeast Asia. "Growth in sub regional areas is crucial to achieve our goals of a more prosperous and progressive Southeast Asian region and we have to follow through with support vital in sustaining growth in the sub-regions", Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo said.

The Bangkok Post, 13 January 2007

Asean bites the 'EU-style' bullet

Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Friday adopted "bold and innovative" recommendations by a high-level advisory group for a European Union- style charter to ensure the group's survival. The recommendations include the relaxation of Asean's long-standing non-interference policy on internal matters, decision making by majority voting in certain cases, sanctions for non-compliance to agreements and creation of a dispute-settlement.

The Manila Times, 13 January 2007

Asean ministers sign pact to protect migrant workers

Asean's economic ministers have approved a declaration that would protect migrant workers in the region. "There is no more conflict at this time, the draft has been approved by senior officials and will be passed to the foreign ministers," Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Esteban Conejos Jr. told reporters Friday. The issue of migrant workers will be one of the key topics when leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian nations meet here over the weekend.

Hindustan Times, 14 January 2007

PM to seek consensus on FTA implementation

With India and the ASEAN clearing a major roadblock to a proposed free trade agreement, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is expected to seek a broad consensus for its early implementation during the India-ASEAN Summit in Philippines on Sunday. After tough negotiations spearheaded by Commerce Minister Kamal Nath in the Philippine city of Cebu in the run-up to Singh's meeting with ASEAN leaders, India's proposal for maintaining a 'negative list' of 490 items with trade coverage not exceeding five per cent by both sides was accepted by the grouping.

Hindustan Times, 14 January 2007

Southeast Asian leaders ink terror pact

Asian leaders on Saturday signed a landmark accord allowing for easier prosecution and extradition of terror suspects in a region that has been hit by deadly attacks and bred Al-Qaeda-linked militants. The legally binding ASEAN Convention on counter-terrorism was signed by the leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Cebu city, becoming the first region-wide anti-terrorism edict. The accord calls on the nations to improve regional cooperation to prevent attacks and to rapidly share intelligence and relay terror warnings among member countries.

International Herald Tribune, 14 January 2007

Trade deal will link Beijing and Asean

China took center stage at the summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations here on Sunday, signing a new trade-in-services agreement with the 10 Southeast Asian countries and winning support for its initiative to reconvene negotiations with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program. The trade and services deal, which emphasizes high-tech services, energy and construction, was billed by conference delegates as a major step forward in establishing a comprehensive free trade pact between Asean and China.

Hindustan Times, 14 January 2007

ASEAN to be ruled by law from now: leaders

Nearly 40 years after Asean was born in Bangkok, the leaders of its ten member states approved the draft of a new charter which will make it a rule-based organisation. The charter whose draft says that Asean will reject "unconstitutional and undemocratic changes in government", even allows for suspension of any member country which does not abide by it. Viewed in the backdrop of the coup in Thailand, increasing political unrest in Philippines, and Myanmar's continuous refusal to give democracy a chance, this is a bold decision.

The Hindu, 15 January 2007

China, ASEAN sign agreement

China and ASEAN countries on Sunday took a major step forward in the plan to establish a bilateral Free Trade Area (FTA) by 2010, which will be the third largest in the world. China and ASEAN signed the Agreement on Trade in Services of China-ASEAN Free Trade Area here, as part of the tenth China-ASEAN Summit attended by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and leaders of the ten ASEAN member countries. The signing is another major achievement in China-ASEAN economic cooperation and trade.

The Financial Express, 15 January 2007

ASEAN leaders talk climate

Asian countries discussed an energy security pact on Monday that seeks to reduce oil dependency and greenhouse gas emissions, but without specific targets. Southeast Asian chiefs along with the heads of China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand held their second East Asia summit in a more constructive atmosphere to last year as Beijing and Tokyo used the meeting to further mend ties.

Hindustan Times, 15 January 2007

East Asia summit boosts India's civil nuclear case

India's quest for global civilian nuclear cooperation brightened on Monday as the 16 leaders of ASEAN and its dialogue partners, which also includes China and Japan, signed a landmark declaration on energy security at the second East Asia summit. The Cebu Declaration on Energy Security was signed by leaders of the East Asia Summit - an evolving regional forum that includes 10 Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and six dialogue partners, comprising China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand.

The Manila Times, 15 January 2007

France and East Timor sign Asean's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation

France on Saturday became the first European Union member-state to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with Asean. French Minister Delegate for European Affairs Catherine Colonna went to Cebu on January 12 and 13 on the occasion of the 12th Summit of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (Asean). Foreign Minister Alberto Romulo, with whom Colonna had talks, said France's accession to the treaty was a step forward that would allow broader engagement and more opportunities for trade and investment between France and Asean.

The Economic Times, 15 January 2007

SE Asia seeks access to emissions market

South East Asian nations are asking Japan's help in getting access to a growing carbon emission trading market, now valued at around \$10 billion. Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, as chairwoman of the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) summit, made the request at the group's meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday. "I would like to make an appeal to Asean and Japan to make special efforts to meet the objectives of the Kyoto Protocol," Arroyo said in prepared remarks to the Japanese.

The Economic Times, 15 January 2007

India, Asean set negative list cap at 5% of trade

The India-Asean summit meeting on Sunday firmed up the principles on which the two sides will

base a comprehensive free trade agreement by July. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met his Asean counterparts and agreed that the negative list ,items on which no tariff reduction will be offered,will not exceed 5% of India?s total trade with Asean countries.

The Economic Times, 15 January 2007

The Road Ahead: Sops for auto cos to meet Asean competition

EVEN as the auto sector is booming, the government is considering a host of longterm incentives for auto companies to face competition from Asean nations. The sops that are being weighed include tax holidays for investments of over Rs 500 crore and bring such units at par with export oriented units (EOUs). The government is also looking at direct tax breaks, including deduction of 50% on foreign exchange earnings by automotive companies and 30% on net income for a period of 10 years for new industrial unit.

The Hindu, 16 January 2007

Australia to join East Asia economic bloc

Australia would join a free trade zone of 16 Asian and Pacific nations under a plan for a landmark East Asia economic bloc including India. Speaking at the East Asia Summit in The Philippines yesterday, Australian Prime Minister John Howard said the Japanese idea of an East Asia free trade bloc, which would rival the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement, was discussed at the meeting and that Australia "supports the feasibility study being carried out". The free trade area stretching from Japan to China, India, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand would cover almost half of the world's population, three billion people, with an economic output of nine trillion dollars.

The Jakarta Post, 16 January 2007

Spirit of ASEAN's Charter

The charter would create a rules-based community for the 47-year-old grouping. It would present ASEAN with the underpinnings needed to progress toward a more principled and efficient organization, thus allowing it to compete better with regional blocs such as the European Union. The charter would take life in the form of a binding mini-constitution. Decision making would no longer rely only on consensus and member states who did not comply with agreed-upon treaties could be censured.

The Times of India, 16 January 2007

Asean to promote biofuels

Asian and Pacific leaders signed an agreement on Monday to help reduce their dependence on conventional sources of energy and promote biofuels. The Cebu Declaration on East Asian Energy Security was signed by leaders from Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, India, Japan, China and South Korea after a three-hour summit in the central Philippine city of Cebu. The agreement lists a set of goals for "reliable, adequate and affordable" energy supplies essential for sustaining economic growth and competitiveness.

The Manila Times, 16 January 2007

"New dawn for Asean"

President Arroyo said on Monday that the successful 12th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and East Asian summits broke a new dawn for peace, stability and prosperity in the region. At a press conference, Mrs. Arroyo said the meetings led to several landmark accords. The result of these new agreements, she added, would be "more prosperous and safe communities, a region of peace and stability, and a world of goodwill and friendship of all creeds, colors and culture. She gave stress to "people-oriented agreements," including the Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and the Mutual Recognition Arrangement on Nursing Services and the Asean's call to "promote decent, humane, productive, dignified and remunerative employment to migrant workers."

Hindustan Times, 16 January 2007

Govt backs Asian 'open skies' regime

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh took forward India's "Look East" policy on Sunday as he sounded positive on a regional "open skies" arrangement that could boost easier flights and thus, trade across the populous continent which has emerged as a global economic force in the new century. The prime minister spent a larger part of his second day in the Philippines building new bridges with the 10-nation Asean members and cementing existing relationships with regional partners including China. Officials said New Delhi will host the next round of Sino-Indian Special Representative (SR)-level talks on January 17-18. Dr Singh also accepted Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's invitation to visit China. "We in India seek to deepen our economic integration by entering into free trade agreements (FTA) or comprehensive economic partnership agreements (CEPA), both with Asean as a whole and with individual countries of the region.

Bernama, 16 January 2007

Asean Closer To Becoming Political, Economic Bloc

The just-ended 12th Asean Summit brings the 10-member regional grouping a step closer to emerge as a political and economic bloc, a long-cherished dream of the grouping's founding fathers and leaders. The leaders, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, have agreed to pursue the realisation of Asean's integration as a dynamic and resilient grouping and evolve into an open Asean Community by 2015. The signing of three key declarations at the two-day summit bears testimony to achieving these goals. They are the Cebu Declaration Towards A Caring and Sharing Community, Cebu Declaration on the Blueprint for the Asean Charter and Cebu Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. This is the first time in Asean's 40-year history that people-centred documents were signed to chart and shape a clear and bright future for the region's 570 million population.

Business Report, 16 January 2007

China beats India to pact with Asean

China yesterday signed a free trade agreement covering 60 services industries with 10 southeast Asian nations, stealing the march on India, which has been negotiating a similar deal for more than two years. The pact, which covers everything from transport to energy services, will come into effect on July 1, according to the agreement released in Cebu, where China's Prime Minister Wen Jiabao met leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean). The services agreement is a step towards fulfilling a decade-long plan to establish an Asean-China free trade area by 2015.

The Times of India, 17 January 2007

China bags oil contract after backing junta

Within days of China blocking a move in the United Nations to pressure Myanmar on the issue of human rights, a major Chinese company has landed a contract to explore oil and gas resources in the country. China is now in competition with India to obtain another contract on a proven gas field in Myanmar. Both countries made no bones of the fact that it was a politically driven decision on the part of Myanmar. The deal was signed by the visiting Chinese vice-chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission Zhang Guobao and Myanmar's minister of energy Brigadier-General Lun Thi.

The Hindu, 17 January 2007

A reprieve for Myanmar junta

The U.S.' latest move on Myanmar, blocked by China and Russia at the U.N., is reflective of the new trend in world politics. It is widely believed in the West that the end of the Cold War has led to the emergence of "global politics." Such politics is about plans and campaigns, often partisan in tone and substance, for international consensus on issues that had earlier divided the world. It is in this climate that China and Russia on Friday vetoed in the United Nations Security Council a draft resolution on Myanmar. Moved by the United States and the United Kingdom, it sought to address Myanmar's internal political situation a blatant denial of democracy. Yet for reasons pertaining to the Security Council's own limited mandate under the U.N. Charter, China and Russia stopped the U.S. in its tracks. So, Washington's move to bring Myanmar's military junta under the prism of "global politics"

has failed.

The Economic Times, 17 January 2007

Asean accepts duty cut call

India and Asean economies have agreed in principle to reduce duties on 700 sensitive manufactured products to either 0% or 5% by 2018, commerce secretary GK Pillai told mediapersons on board the Prime Minister's aircraft while returning from the India-Asean summit. This is a significant move forward considering the Asean economies were reluctant to agree to such low tariffs on manufactured items. Mr Pillai said the Asean members realised that India will have much greater global competitiveness and scale in manufactured items in sectors such as metals, plastics and petrochemicals.

The Manila Times, 17 January 2007

Long-term gains from summit seen

President Arroyo has high hopes the Philippines' hosting of the 12th Association of the Southeast Asian Nation Summit would yield long-term and high-value gains for the country. The President said the accomplishment of the Asean and East Asia summits is an "unstoppable force" that will help drive the Philippine agenda in the years to come. The horizon is open for great challenges and opportunities, in fielding Filipino excellence through a broader regional market of services, sharing technology in alternative energy sources, bringing collective resources to bear upon pockets of instability and enforcing democracy and human rights, Mrs. Arroyo said.

The Financial Express, 17 January 2007

Thailand government lashes out at Singapore for letting in Thaksin

Thailand's military government suspended a nine-year-old exchange programme with Singapore on Tuesday in protest at a meeting between ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and one of the city-state's cabinet ministers. Having dressed down Singapore's ambassador on Thaksin's visit, Bangkok tore up its invitation to foreign minister George Yeo to a joint meeting of civil servants at the end of this month a measure of the growing bad blood between the southeast Asian allies. Singapore said Thaksin's weekend talks with deputy Prime Minister S. Jayakumar were private, but Thailand's ruling generals, who cancelled his diplomatic passport less than a week ago, were not persuaded of its innocence.

The Financial Express, 18 January 2007

Thailand cuts rates to spur economic growth

The Bank of Thailand (BOT) cut its key policy rate on Wednesday to try to spur economic growth, its first reduction in borrowing costs since 2003. The decision also marks the first cut in headline rates by a central bank of an Asian emerging economy, other than Indonesia, since a record-breaking oil rally fuelled inflation and a flurry of global rate rises. Analysts said the cut showed the central bank had shifted its focus to economic growth after foreign investor sentiment was shaken by capital controls on the baht and restrictions on overseas ownership of local companies.

The Manila Times, 18 January 2007

Singapore "saddened" over Thai junta action

Singapore said it is saddened at Thailand's actions against the city-state after a controversial private visit by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In a statement Tuesday, the city-state said it had no reason to turn away Thaksin, the elected leader ousted in a bloodless coup in September. Thailand earlier Tuesday summoned Singapore's ambassador in connection with Thaksin's weekend visit to the city-state, and withdrew an invitation that had been extended to Singapore's foreign minister.

The Bangkok Post, 18 January 2007

A blunder in diplomacy

It is unfortunate that the delicate bilateral relationship between Thailand and Singapore, bruised by the fallout from the Temasek-Shin share deal scandal, has unprecedentedly hit rock bottom. All high-level meetings between the two countries have been suspended, including the planned visit to

Bangkok this month by Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo to attend a three-day meeting on the Singapore-Thailand civil service exchange programme, which has been cancelled. The source of this latest unfortunate diplomatic hiccup is none other than Thaksin Shinawatra, for his recent social-cum-political activities in the island state: his meeting with Singapore's Deputy Premier S. Jayakumar, followed by interviews with CNN and the Asian Wall Street Journal.

The Statesman, 19 January 2007

Thailand sends mixed signals to Singapore

The head of the Council of National Security, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, yesterday, sent Singapore mixed signals even as the two allies squabbled over political sensitivity and national sovereignty. Singapore has claimed it has the right to let ousted Premier Mr Thaksin Shinawatra meet with its deputy Premier, Mr S Jayakumar, while Thailand has accused the city-state of lacking discretion for doing so. Gen. Sonthi told a forum that foreign ownership of the telecommunications industry could jeopardise national security.

The Manila Times, 19 January 2007

Myanmar's minorities decimated in a Brutal conflict raging far from world's eyes

Even as fighting raged all around them, Pi Lu never thought she would have to uproot her eight children and flee their small village in eastern Myanmar. She stayed even after her husband was killed in 2003, when he stepped on a landmine that had been planted in one of their rice paddies. But over the last year, an offensive by Myanmar's military government to clear out villages in Pi Lu's ethnic Karen homeland escalated to a point where she could bear it.

The Bangkok Post, 19 January 2007

Japan warned on Thaksin

The Foreign Ministry sent strong signals to Japan shortly before deposed prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra arrived in the country last night, spokesman Kitti Wasinondh said yesterday. Japanese ambassador to Thailand Hideaki Kobayashi acknowledged the signals over the "Thaksin issue" during a recent meeting with Foreign Minister Nitya Pibulsonggram, he said.

The Nation, 19 January 2007

Thaksin can return under conditions: Surayud

Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont said Friday that his predecessor Thaksin Shinawatra might be allowed to return to the country under certain conditions. Surayud was answering a question of one of eight senior editors, who met him at Ban Phitsanulok at noon. "He could return but we have to consider conditions first. We need to discuss about it first," Surayud replied

Financial Express, 19 January 2007

Thailand named world's best tourist country

Thailand has been voted as the World's Best Tourist Country in the Norwegian Grand Travel Awards 2007 held in Oslo, Norway earlier this month, according to the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry said that the Thai Embassy in Oslo reported that it is the fourth consecutive year Thailand won the annual award organised by Travel News Magazine of Norway. Greece, Denmark and Italy ranked second, third and fourth respectively.

The Financial Express, 20 January 2007

Myanmar to decide on gas exports to India by May

Myanmar will decide on exporting gas to India by May, after it gets the reserves in its offshore areas certified, said U Soe Myint, director general, energy planning division, ministry of energy, Myanmar. "The current estimate of gas reserves would not support export of gas to India either through a pipeline or in the form of LNG," he told reporters. Independent certifiers have certified 4.8 trillion cubic feet gas reserves in offshore block A-1, while in the adjacent block A-3 the reserves will be established after the current appraisal drilling is completed in May. Gas from the two blocks will be tied up and developed together.

The Hindu, 20 January 2007

India not interested in exporting ideology: Pranab

Barely days after an unsuccessful American attempt to get the United Nations Security Council to censure Myanmar's military rulers, India has reiterated that the issue of democracy and human rights in Myanmar is "an internal matter" of that country. Speaking to reporters here at the start of a three-day visit to Myanmar, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said India had to deal with governments "as they exist ... We are not interested in exporting our own ideology. We are a democracy and we would like democracy to flourish everywhere. But this is for every country to decide for itself."

Asia Times, 20 January 2007

India gains little from courting Myanmar

India's decision to woo Myanmar's military rulers to get them to cooperate with its efforts in fighting insurgency in its northeastern states appears not to be working. Outfits such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which recently carried out a series of deadly attacks on migrants in the state of Assam, continue to thrive thanks to support and sanctuary from Myanmar.

Hindustan Times, 21 January 2007

Thaksin can return if he abandons politics: PM

Thailand's prime minister said on Saturday that toppled leader Thaksin Shinawatra could return to the kingdom if he vowed not to engage in politics, after the ousted premier said he wished to go home. Interviewed on state-run television by his press spokesman Yongyuth Mayalarp, Surayud Chulanont said that Thaksin could return to Thailand under certain conditions, but only after negotiating with the junta and government.

The Hindu, 21 January 2007

In phantom capital, a city slowly takes shape

Nobody quite knows what prompted the military government to relocate Myanmar's capital to this isolated, dusty place 320 km north of Yangon last year but judging by the pace and scale of construction under way here, the transfer is intended to be final and irrevocable.

The Hindu, 22 January 2007

India to supply military equipment to Myanmar

India has promised Myanmar's military rulers a "favourable response" to their request for military equipment. External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee conveyed the Indian decision to Vice-Senior General Maung Aye, number two in the hierarchy of the military-run State Peace and Development Council regime, during a 45-minute meeting held on Sunday morning. Speaking to reporters afterwards, Mr. Mukherjee said he told his hosts that India was willing to expand the ambit of military cooperation between the two countries. A specific request for equipment had been made by General Thura Shwe Mann, the regime's number three, during his visit to Delhi last December. "We have examined that request and decided to give a favourable response," Mr. Mukherjee said.

The Hindu, 22 January 2007

"Gas for India only if reserves permit"

Vice-Senior General Maung Aye, second-in-command of Myanmar's military regime, has said his Government is not yet in a position to guarantee assured supplies of gas for the proposed Myanmar-India pipeline because the requisite survey of reserves has not yet been completed. In a meeting with External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee on Sunday, the General said the survey would be completed by April or May. If the reserves proved to be large enough and India was able to offer a competitive price, his Government would have no objection to earmarking it for an Indian pipeline.

The Jakarta Post, 22 January 2007

RI urged to take active role in South Pacific region

Human and drug trafficking, arms smuggling and money laundering are on the rise among small South Pacific island nations. Experts warn this poses a considerable security threat to Indonesia's

eastern territory and borders. Security and international studies expert at New Zealand's Victoria University of Wellington, James Veitch, said Indonesia's interest in protecting its eastern border required it to take an active role in fostering greater cooperation with South Pacific nations.

The Statesman, 22 January 2007

Abu Sayyaf most-wanted dead for sure

The era of the Janjalani brothers in the annals of Philippine terrorism has come to an end. It was the saliva of one of the brothers that did it. "We hit the jackpot, there was a match in the DNA," armed forces chief of staff Gen Hermogenes Esperon Jr said yesterday, confirming the death of Khaddafy Janjalani, the boyish-looking chieftain of the Abu Sayyaf bandit group and dubbed South-east Asia's most wanted man. "We are sure it is Janjalani," Gen Esperon said shortly after receiving a faxed report of what he called a conclusive DNA test carried out by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The Nation, 22 January 2007

Several concerns over drafting of new constitution

Activists fear junta may impose its own choice to head drafting panel; members fret over finer points of referendum. Several points of concern, which could spell doom for the new constitution, are being raised even before the drafting of the charter has officially begun. The 35-member Constitution Drafting Committee is to be officially endorsed by the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) today before it can elect a panel chairman and begin the drafting process. But concerns have already come up, including the fear of selection of an unacceptable panel chairman, inconvenient rules for CDA members to improve the draft and worries that the draft would be eventually voted down in a public referendum.

The Statesman, 23 January 2007

Steps to boost India, Vietnam trade mulled

The language barrier and high rates of tariff in India were identified as major impediments to trade between India and Vietnam at a seminar organised by the Bharat Chamber of Commerce (BCC) in the city today. Addressing the seminar, president of the BCC Mr PR Agarwal said that communication was of utmost importance in business and with few people able to understand Vietnamese, trade ties between the two countries could not be consolidated. "We have proposed to the Vietnam embassy that if they start a language course here, the BCC will sponsor it," he said.

The Financial Express, 23 January 2007

SE Asia well positioned for any US slowdown: Lehman

Southeast Asian countries are well positioned to weather a possible US slowdown as they have ample room to adjust fiscal and monetary policies to stimulate domestic demand, Lehman Brothers said on Monday. Singapore would benefit the most from sustained growth in its neighbours, where falling inflation has created room for monetary easing, said Rob Subbaraman, senior Asia economist with the investment bank. "We are generally positive on Southeast Asia. The reason is that there have been more structural reforms in recent years in Southeast Asia than Northeast Asia," Subbaraman told reporters in Singapore.

The Bangkok Post, 23 January 2007

Sonthi boosts China 'friendly relations'

China and Thailand on Monday pledged to boost their military ties as the Thai army commander paid his first visit to China, Xinhua news agency and the Chinese media reported this morning. "The Chinese army would like to promote friendly relations with the Thai army," Chinese Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan said in a meeting with army commander Sonthi Boonyaratkalin Monday afternoon. Echoing Cao's views, Sonthi said Thailand will make continuous efforts to boost its military ties with China, the media said.

The Manila Times, 23 January 2007

US on PR roll in RP; relations at a high

US Ambassador to Manila Kristie Kenney said on Monday that relations between her country and the Philippines were back at a high after two of the most wanted Islamic militants here were killed. Kenney's statement as she joined US troops in distributing relief goods to Bicol victims of a recent super typhoon, preceded the arrival on Wednesday of US President George W. Bush's image builder, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen P. Hughes.

The Irrawaddy, 23 January 2007

India to Continue Arming Burma

India has promised further military aid to Burma's ruling junta and asked for increased cooperation in fighting Indian insurgent groups operating along its border with Burma, according to Indian press reports. The issues were raised during a three-day visit to Burma's administrative capital Naypyidaw by a delegation led by India's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, who met Vice Snr-Gen Maung Aye on Sunday.

The Hindu, 24 January 2007

India has legitimate interests in South East Asia: George Yeo

India has very legitimate interests in South East Asia such as the protection of air and sealanes, Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo told The Hindu in an exclusive interview here on Monday. "We see India's presence as being a beneficial and beneficent one to all of us in South-east Asia," Mr. Yeo stressed, maintaining that India's engagement with South-east Asia was growing from strength to strength. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) looked at the peaceful rise of India and China with a mixture of opportunity and concern. Pointing out that both countries were low-cost producers in different ways, Mr. Yeo was candid about the challenges that ASEAN faced.

The Hindu, 24 January 2007

India and China are key to peace in Asia

Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo is no stranger to India. Trade between the two countries, estimated at \$10 billion in 2005, is booming and bilateral relations have never been better. Excerpts from an exclusive interview in New Delhi.

Hindustan Times, 24 January 2007

Thais won't tolerate dictatorship: Thaksin

Thailand's ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra has warned the country will not tolerate "dictatorship" indefinitely after he was deposed in a military coup. In an interview published on Tuesday on a visit to Japan, Thaksin said Thailand's international credibility was at stake but that he sought unity between his supporters and opponents. "Thais have enjoyed democracy and never want to be under a dictatorship or a non-democratic government," Thaksin told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

Hindustan Times, 24 January 2007

Myanmar is not so Far Away

External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee's visit to Myanmar seems to have gone off well, with the two countries reiterating common interests and signing a slew of bilateral agreements. Of particular significance is the decision taken by the two sides to fence certain stretches of the border, which will help in cracking down on insurgent groups that maintain training camps on the Myanmar side. Hundreds of rebels from the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) are believed to have fled to these camps. But State visits shouldn't detract from the fact that India has yet to have a proactive policy to engage Myanmar.

The Financial Express, 25 January 2007

Southeast Asian neighbours create economic triangle

Neighbours Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia have a history of squabbling. Land, boundaries, workers and water have been among the points of contention. But singed by the competitive heat of fast-growing China and India and frustrated by the glacial pace of Southeast Asia's economic

integration, the three are trying to put old grudges aside for the sake of their own prosperity. Indonesia has created a special economic zone on its Riau islands between Singapore and Indonesia, while Malaysia has a multi-billion-dollar plan to develop industry in its southern Johor state bordering Singapore. One aim is to attract foreign investment and stop it heading off to China or India.

Financial Times, 25 January 2007

Singapore feels heat on economic agenda

As Singapore has prospered as a trading centre in a region with its fair share of economic laggards, the city-state has often stood accused of economic imperialism. Especially as Temasek, its investment arm, has acquired a growing list of assets in often strategic industries in neighbouring countries. In what Singapore's officials say are purely commercial investments by Temasek, local opponents have long seen "dollar diplomacy" at work and a political as well as an economic agenda. But mounting efforts by Thailand's government to reduce Temasek's stake in Shin Corp, the telecoms group, have raised the regional political pressure on Singapore and Temasek to a new level. The stake was bought last year from the family of Thaksin Shinawatra, the prime minister ousted by Thailand's current military rulers.

The Manila Times, 25 January 2007

Bush wants action to end North Korean, Myanmar crises

US President George W. Bush called for concerted action to end North Korea's nuclear weapons drive, the Taliban offensive in Afghanistan and help restore democracy in Myanmar in his annual State of the Union address. He called for a coordinated response to the threat of international terrorism, citing Southeast Asia's success in breaking up a terrorist cell grooming operatives for attacks inside the United States.

The Korea Herald, 25 January 2007

Vietnam's sizzling growth tops 8 percent

Foreign visitors to Vietnam usually marvel at throngs of motorcycles on the streets, squeezing out junky bicycles - symbols of a lackluster communist-led economy. But they are even more surprised by the fact that it is very difficult to see elderly people on the streets. People aged 25 or below account for about half of the total population, due to Vietnam's war with the United States, and before that, with France. The young population offers a large pool of industrious and creative workers for offices and factories and is a crucial ingredient of Vietnam's sizzling economic growth. The state-led push for industrialization, free trade and privatization is also fueling the once war-torn Southeast Asian state.

The Financial Express, 26 January 2007

Malaysia looks at easing foreign ownership curbs

Malaysia is looking at easing some curbs on foreign ownership in state-linked companies, according to its biggest listed firm, state-controlled energy utility Tenaga Nasional Bhd. Tenaga, whose foreign ownership is pressing up against a 25% ceiling, told a quarterly results briefing on Thursday that state investment arm Khazanah Nasional was considering whether to allow foreigners to increase their voting rights. Currently, foreign investors cannot vote more than a certain proportion of shares in some state-linked firms 25% in the case of Tenaga, even if the ownership ceiling is exceeded.

Hindustan Times, 26 January 2007

Myanmar releases 400 custom staff members

Authorities in military-run Myanmar on Friday released nearly 400 customs staff who were hauled in for questioning over corruption allegations nearly three months ago. Myanmar purged about one-fifth of its customs department in mid-November last year as part of an ongoing anti-graft drive, which began with the arrest and imprisonment of the customs chief.

The Brunei Times, 26 January 2007

Myanmar accuses US of terror plot

MILITARY-RUN Myanmar yesterday accused the United States of plotting to install a puppet government in the country, after US President George W Bush vowed to keep pressing it for reform. The New Light of Myanmar newspaper, a government mouthpiece, accused the United States of pressing for a UN Security Council resolution against the country as a way of installing a new government. China and Russia vetoed the resolution, but Bush said in his State of the Union address last Tuesday that Washington "will continue to speak out for the cause of freedom" in Myanmar. "In pursuing the scheme, the US in 2006 put pressure on the United Nations Security Council to intervene in Myanmar issues, while destabilising tranquillity and peace and stirring up mass protests and destructive acts in synchronisation in Myanmar," the New Light of Myanmar newspaper said.

The Nation, 26 January 2007

Dr Mahathir not official mediator for Thai south problems

Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad was never told to back off from mediating in the Muslim insurgency in southern Thailand as he was never made an "official" mediator. Malaysia Foreign Minister Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Government was aware that the former prime minister had close contacts with the Thais and he was informed to make full use of this to help bring peace to the troubled region. "He never had an official role. I was the one who asked him to do whatever he could since he was invited by Thaksin Shinawatra, then the Thai leader," Syed Hamid told The Star.

The Hindu, 27 January 2007

An eclipse of U.S. in East Asia

EAST ASIAN countries, bracing for economic cooperation, are slowly relegating the United States to the margins of the region. The current eclipse of the U.S. in East Asia is far more evident behind the scenes than in the public domain. Yet Japan and Australia, allies of the U.S., are privy to its latest marginalisation by the East Asia Summit (EAS). On January 24, Japanese Defence Minister Fumio Kyuma asserted that U.S. President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003 was "wrong." And, Japan, which recently pulled out its troops sent to Iraq on a non-combat mission, could not be bound by his latest moves. So, up in the air now was the issue whether Tokyo should continue its ongoing air-logistics support for the U.S.-led forces in Iraq, Mr. Kyuma hinted.

The Nation, 27 January 2007

Manila opts for liberal stance

The Philippines is set to liberalise existing restrictions on capital outflows as a way of hedging against the strong influx of foreign money, while keeping its monetary policy steady for now. Sources at the central bank, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), yesterday said a package of measures to liberalise capital accounts, focusing on outflows, was being prepared and would soon be presented for approval by the Monetary Board. "We will be responding to capital flows in due time," said a BSP source. "We have to do something about the expected heavy inflows."

International Herald Tribune, 27 January 2007

Prime ministers of Vietnam, Philippines differ on how to deal with Myanmar

Vietnam and the Philippines on Friday differed on how firmly to coax Myanmar toward democracy, reflecting potential problems ahead on what constitutes interference into the internal affairs of other members of their 10-nation free trade zone. Southeast Asian countries have long voiced support for a joint charter. But the proposed addition of possible sanctions or expulsion from ASEAN was likely to be a hard one to accept, particularly for the ruling military junta in Myanmar, also called Burma.

The Financial Express, 27 January 2007

Rising economy of India not to impact ASEAN

Rising economies of India and China will not have an adverse impact on the ASEAN but will only help the member countries of the South East Asian trading bloc, Minister of State for Industry Ashwani Kumar has said. "India's strengthened presence in the global economy would boost the country's imports, which can increasingly come from the ASEAN nations," Kumar said at a session on Regional Agenda-Asia, at the World Economic Forum meeting.

Hindustan Times, 28 January 2007

Thailand lifts martial law in 41 provinces

Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej has signed the royal decree lifting martial law in 41 of the kingdom's 76 provinces, including Bangkok, effective from January 26. Martial law was imposed immediately after the military staged a bloodless coup last September 19 ousting the elected government of then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The lifting was approved by the military-backed government in November pending royal endorsement which was announced in the Royal Gazette on Friday.

The Hindu, 28 January 2007

Premier's plea on peace

Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont on Saturday called for cooperation from all sections to restore peace in the south. Mr. Surayud was chairing a meeting on a government programme to improve life in the troubled region, according to the Thai News Agency. He said solving the unrest was a national agenda and that his Government would try its best to create a better understanding between the Buddhists and the Muslims. Peace must prevail before economic and communication developments could be implemented.

The Hindu, 29 January 2007

Malaysia's ruling coalition scores overwhelming win

Malaysia's governing coalition clinched a landslide victory in a rural state by-election following a boycott by Opposition parties that feared the ballot would be marred by fraud. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's National Front on Sunday trounced a lone challenger Ng Chee Pang, 22, a little-known independent with scarcely any political experience - to retain the legislative seat of Batu Talam in eastern Pahang state. The National Front's candidate, Abdul Aziz Mat Kiram, secured 89 per cent of 7,080 votes cast, beating Ng by a majority of 5,857 votes, the Election Commission said. Ng received 419 votes, while another 385 ballots were spoilt.

Hindustan Times, 29 January 2007

Myanmar crackdown on NSCN-K kills 15

A dozen Myanmarese soldiers and three militants died in fresh fighting when Myanmar launched a massive military crackdown to evict anti-India rebels from its soil, a rebel leader said on Monday. A spokesman of the SS Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K) said Myanmar's military junta had burnt down the outfit's general headquarters and two other camps in that country's northern Sagaing Division.

The Hindu Business Line, 29 January 2007

Petro products: Govt undecided on Myanmar, Bangla Re payment terms

Government is yet to take a view on Myanmar's proposal for rupee payment terms for petroleum product imports from India. This has led Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) to put on hold its move to seek export trading house status for its subsidiary, Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL), located in the North East. The company had also proposed a similar deal with Bangladesh. According to sources, while Myanmar had said that it would import in rupees, Bangladesh is yet to get back to NRL on its offer of exports of petroleum products.

The Times of India, 29 January 2007

Malaysian PM attacks Internet users

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has accused Malaysians of using the Internet to spread lies about him, according to a report on Sunday. The premier also insisted he still had the support of the majority of Malaysians despite attacks by critics. Abdullah said Malaysians were using the freedom and anonymity of the Internet and mobile text messages to make "unfounded allegations."

The Statesman, 29 January 2007

China is not a threat, says Badawi

Asean regards China as a friend and not a threat, said Mr Abdullah Ahmed Badawi during a plenary discussion at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Badawi said Asean had developed good relations with China through increased trade and economic relationships. "We see China as a challenge, a friend in the neighbourhood," he said to a question on Asean's response to the rise of China and India. He was speaking at the plenary session on Asean's 40 Years: A New Future at the World Economic Forums annual meeting on 26 January.

The Hindu, 30 January 2007

India and East Asia

Foreign Minister George Yeo was reflecting Singapore's far-sighted and consistently helpful attitude when he characterised India's interest and presence in the East as being "beneficial and beneficent to all of us in South East Asia." He regards India's rise in the world "good for Singapore...good for the region." The stance taken by the city state's political leadership over the past decade and more has helped India not just to build a new partnership with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), but also to establish a new equation with the larger region. Singapore was among the first countries in the East to recognise India's growing importance for the larger region from both the economic and strategic viewpoints. This led naturally to the India-Singapore strategic partnership.

The Hindu, 30 January 2007

"The Asean-India relationship has reached a high point"

A "strategic approach" is the best way to clinch the difficult trade pact between India and the Association of South East Asian Nations by the July timeline. Asean Secretary General Ong Keng Yong, in an exclusive interview in Singapore on Sunday, said the two sides cannot do without such an accord. Excerpts:

The Manila Times, 30 January 2007

Myanmar crackdown puts Indian insurgents on the run-rebels

A major military crackdown by Myanmar has sent Indian separatists fleeing and left a growing death toll, a rebel leader told Agence France-Presse on Monday. The junta had burnt down the general headquarters and two camps held by the SS Khaplang faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. "Heavy fighting is going on with a brigade [about 3,000 men] of the Myanmarese army using mortars and rocket launchers, launching a massive assault on our cadres since the weekend," senior council leader A.Z. Jami said by telephone. The council, fighting for an independent homeland for Naga tribal peoples in the northeastern Indian state of Nagaland, has at least 50 camps with some 5,000 guerrilla fighters in Sagaing, northern Myanmar.

The Times of India, 31 January 2007

Singapore shores closer for ICICI, SBI

Standard and Poor's upgrading India's rating to investment grade should give the country's trade pact with Singapore, and consequently, Indian banks' overseas expansion plans, a shot in the arm. Plans of India's largest commercial bank State Bank of India (SBI) and private sector leader ICICI Bank, which were thwarted in their Singapore foray because the city-state has strict rating norms, will now get a boost. Applications of these banks for a QFB (qualified full banks) status were held up because the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) requires the country rating from which the bank is applying to be investment grade. A QFB licence permits banks to access the retail market in Singapore. So far, India's 'speculative' rating was considered to be a major disqualification from these banks getting QFB status in Singapore.

The Irrawaddy, 31 January 2007

Burma Could Be the Next Humanitarian Folly (Online Commentary)

Well aware that humanitarian assistance can often go awry, the democracy movement has fought long and hard to ensure that aid to Burma is delivered in an accountable and transparent manner that does not entrench the Burmese government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The unfolding controversy in North Korea is testament to the pitfalls of humanitarian assistance. Recent allegations state that as much as US \$100 million earmarked for humanitarian aid may have been

misappropriated by Kim Jong-il over the past decade, possibly even funding his nuclear program.

The Mizzima News, 31 January 2007

Border trade with Burma resumes

With the lifting of the indefinite economic blockade on National Highway 39 in Manipur, border trade between India and Burma has resumed over the past two days. The All Tribal Students Union Manipur which imposed the blockade suspended its agitation in view of the ensuing election in this border state. "We're lifting the blockade in view of the election, not because we reached any agreement with the government," an executive member of ATSUM said. The economic blockade was lifted on January 26 midnight.

The Manilla Bulletin, 31 January 2007

Japanese business sentiment in ASEAN region remains positive

However, business sentiment of Japanese companies was depressed in China and North Asia, as firms in Taiwan and South Korea reported declining sentiment in January, according to the latest survey by Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). The JETRO survey showed that the overall current business sentiment in the ASEAN countries has improved in January, with the index gaining 1.5 points and reaching into positive territory for the first time in 14 months. Indonesia saw its index return to positive territory for the first time in 15 months at 4.6, owing to a continued recovery in domestic demand for electric and electronics equipment and transport equipment. JETRO said the overall outlook of business sentiment for the ASEAN region declined 3.8 points in the January survey at -2.8, due to low expectations for increased demand in overseas market.