

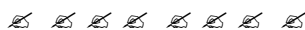
News Wrap

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The decision of the US government to sit at an inter-national conference table in Baghdad, with Iran and Syria, as convened by the Iraqi government, stems from the recommendations of the US Congress Iraq study group, to include all of Iraq's neighbours in a new diplomatic offensive and constructive engagement. Few of Iraq's Sunni Arab Neighbours have supported the Shia-dominated government of Nuri al-Maliki. They consider it to be a puppet of assertive Iran, which is supplying arms and undercover agents to support shia militias, across the border in Iraq. From across the western border, Syria despatches Foreign Fighters to Iraq, to assist Sunni insurgency. Despite conflicting interests, some co-operation and contact groups between Iraq's US occupying forces, and its Arab, Persian and Turkish Neighbours is necessary for any future stability.

In spite of epithets of being part of an "axis of evil", the US administration has had oppurtunities of dialogue with Iran and Syria. Formal diplomatic ties between USA and Syria exist. US and Iranian diplomats meet at the UN and other multilateral forums. Petroleum deposits exist extensively in Iraq's Kurdish north and Shia South. Re-examination of old seismic data has now revealed vast petroleum deposits and natural gas in Sunni areas of the Anbar desert. The Akkas oil field is just 20 miles from the Syrian border.

The Iraqi Prime Minister, Noori-al-Maliki conducted talks with envoys from West Asian states, and from the five permanent members of the UN security council. The talks in Iraq's fortified Green Zone, covered the situation in Iraq, with Iraq's demand that Iraq should not be a battlefied between regional powers, referring to rivalries between Shia Iran and the Sunni Arabs, encircling Iraq.



China allowed businessmen to join the Communist Party in 2002, providing entrepreneurs more Networking opportunities. Property rights were enshrined in the constitution in 2004. China's parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC) has just approved giving individuals a similar extent of legal protection as the state. Fifty years ago, during Mao's Great Leap Forward, mass collectivisation left farmland "collectively" owned. Thirty-year-old leases have since been granted to peasants. Outside the agricultural sector, it is still unclear whether a "private enterprise" is under ownership of individuals, or by a local government, or party unit. The new property rights law would certainly reassure China's fast growing middle class, that their assets are secure from threats of central government take over. Efforts to keep happy the property owning middle class could be a betrayal of socialism. The ill-gotten fortunes of corrupt officials and businessmen would be protected. State-owned industries may pass into private hands.

Millions of farmers have become landless, following the large appropriation of farmland for housing and factory construction, in recent years. The new law permits the farmers to renew their land-use leases after they expire. Rural land is "collectively" owned, where the village committees represent the collective. The government's powers

to appropriate land, have not been limited. Income growth in the countryside is about 7.4% and about 10.4% in urban areas.



Democratic elections are due in June in Nepal. As the Maoists approach National power, ethnic supporters who cheered them in the conflict against royalty, are drifting away. Strikes and protests by ethnic groups are resulting in violence and fatal casualties, leading to threats to the peace process. The Madhesi movement comprises half a dozen competing groups from the southern Terai's plains of Nepal. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities represent diverse settlers from the Himalyan foothills. The ethnic identity groups aim to end the upper Hindu caste domination, led by Brahmins and Chetris (warriors), who constitute 28% of the population. Since Nepal was unified in the 18th century, these higher castes have controlled the country. The maoist rebels are led by Brahmins. The ethnic groups are demanding proportional representation in the elections and an ethnic-federalist constitutional structure. Some of the separatists live in economically thriving zones, and control the supply links to Kathmandu.



The West Bengal government is offering land to farmers, who have sacrificed their land to the Tata Car factory in Singur, to ensure that the compensation money for land surrender, is not wasted away. The farmers will have to pay from the compensation money, for purchasing suitable identified land, as provided by the government. Meanwhile, findings and casualties from bullet wounds pour in from Nandigram. On 14 March, 07, "restoration of the rule of law by 3000 policemen faced with a 5000 strong mob, armed with arms, bombs and other weapons, at Nandigram has caused the death of 'fourteen' farmers. The violence in Nandigram will further delay notifications of Special Economic Zones". Presently only 63 of a total 235 SEZs approved, and not facing any land acquisition disputes have been notified by the union government. Since the delays to notification of SEZs are affecting the commercial commitments of industry, certain big companies in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are threatening to withdraw. The few thousand workers these companies had trained and employed, are likely to be retrenched.