

# NEWS WRAP

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Separatist insurgency in Muslim-dominated Southern Thailand has already claimed more than 2000 Muslim and Buddhist fatal casualties. Thousands of Buddhists have fled their homes, since the violence re-appeared in 2004. The killing of Buddhists has caused revenge attacks on mosques. Sectarian violence has risen. Of the 64 million population of Thailand, 95% belong to the Theravada school of Buddhism, practised in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Cambodia. The rest are mainly Muslims, living in the southern provinces, bordering Malaysia. A proposed new constitution recognizes Buddhism, as Thailand's official religion. The new constitution has been drafted by a panel from Thailand's military junta. It also proposes to replace the elected senate, with an appointed one, and cutting the number of parliamentarians. While orange robed monks, led by the Traditional National symbol of nine elephants, have been rallying to support the new constitutional clauses, Buddhist Nationals have been opposing the new clauses. Nationalism and religion are leading to the escalation of insurgency in Southern Thailand.

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Estonia moved a Soviet-era war memorial and nine unmarked graves from the centre of capital Tallinn, to its international military cemetery. Prime Minister Andrus Ansip's Reform party was founded by free market ex-communists. After the monument was sealed off, hundreds of ethnic Russians rioted in Tallinn. Since May 1st, Russian oil and coal exports to Estonia have been stopped, pending "repairs" to railways.

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In the context of legal powers of war and peace, the US office of Legal Counsel provides legal advice to the entire executive branch of the US government and by custom and law, its opinions are binding on the US federal agencies. A "torture memo" compiled by OLC lawyers in August 2002, allows interrogators with the authority to act with maximum impunity, in spite of torture being a serious federal crime. Several conclusions are spelt out. Unless the interrogator specifically intends the pain to reach the level associated with organ failure or death, inflicting physical pain does not count as torture. Inflicting mental suffering is lawful, unless the interrogator intends it to last months or years beyond the interrogation. Enforcing criminal laws against presidentially authorized torturers would be unconstitutional. Lawful self-defence can include torturing helpless detainees in the name of National defense.

After the Abu Ghraib revelations of 2004, the OLC withdrew the memo, and replaced it with a second memo on interrogation, and treatment of detainees. The principal author of the original memo, John Woo, in his book "War by Other Means", maintains that the OLC's substitute memo made mostly cosmetic changes, and approved the same treatment of detainees, as the original torture memo. The US Military Commissions Act of September '06, states that humiliation and unfair trials are not crimes, and forbids detainees from invoking their Geneva rights in military commissions. On torture, USA can do what it wishes.

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India has experienced a super-fast growth of 7.3% for the last four years only. Even then consultants Mc Kinsey have pointed out in a recent report that India may overtake Germany, as the world's fifth biggest consumer market. The report predicts that the middle class will increase from 50 million to 583 million, leaving only a fifth

of India's population in the lowest house-hold income bracket earnings of less than Rs. 90,000/- a year. Gloomily the report observes that spending on education and infrastructure will have to increase to uphold the analysis. India's relative weak fiscal position and alarming school education standards discourage visions of any imminent boom.

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Recent findings point to over-use of certain fertilizers in India, resulting in the change in soil chemistry of a number of regions. The existing fertilizer subsidy modus is now being re-structured by the central government. A nutrient based subsidy regime is being introduced to encourage a balanced use of fertilizers in the country, replacing the existing product-based subsidy method. Currently only fifteen fertilizer products (viz Urea, etc.) are receiving government subsidy. Under the revised subsidy regime, all fertilizer products could be eligible for government subsidy, in proportion to their nutrient-content value. Each of the 150 fertilizer products in the market, will be entitled to subsidy, on a per kilogram basis.

Along with nitrogen, phosphorous and potash, micro-nutrients and sulphur have been included in the list of fertilizers, which will receive subsidy, calculated on nutrient-content value. Under the re-structuring, many non-concessional fertilizers are expected to become cheaper. Farmers would find the fertilizers within his purchasing power. Options for ideal combination of fertilizers should also widen.

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Manipur's Meitei Mayek script, distinct from the Bengali script, has its origin from the Mongoloid script. This script was discontinued during the rule of Maharaja Pamheiba (1709-48). The local group Meelal has been trying to revive the Meitei Mayek script since the mid-1970's. Along with the banned Kangleipak Communist Party, the Meelal in 2004, burnt thousands of text books in the Bengali script, and ordered vernacular dailies to publish front page news in Meitei Mayek. But most Manipuris are not even familiar with Meitei Mayek, nor do they have any special interest in learning the script. There are few qualified teachers in Meitei Mayek, with at least three years experience, to fulfil Meelal's demands. Recently, the Manipur state government has introduced Meitei Mayek script from the primary school level, commencing from the current academic year.

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