

NEWS WRAP

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North Korea's president Kim Jong II met South Korea's president Roh Moohyun in Pyongyang in the first week of October '07, in the second-ever inter Korean Summit. There was agreement to enable a formal end to the civil war of the 1950s. Mr Kim was willing to accept aid on his own terms; and not merely for reducing tensions on the peninsula, in return for aid and investment, which would transform the economy. Dismissal greeted suggestions for North Korea to pursue Chinese style liberalization, in exchange for Marshall Plan type aid. The joint agreement allowed freight trains from South Korea to Kaesong (North Korea). The two countries would renew efforts to help families estranged by the civil war to meet. Further talks are expected with USA and China, to formally end the civil war. Meeting of defence ministers and joint mining of fisheries in a disputed western maritime area, would lead to reduction of military tensions.

China has pointed out that North Korea has agreed to disable its main Nuclear reactor and reprocessing plant at Yongbyon by end-2007. Yongbyon, which is the principal source of North Korea's bomb-grade plutonium, has been shut down, since July '07. North Korea is expected to receive \$100 million in aid, if it sticks to its pledges, and allows US-led inspection teams to oversee the nuclear plant disablement. Once North Korea surrenders its meagre Nuclear weapons, along with its stock of fissile material, the Korean peninsula would be Nuclear-free.

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Certain Latin American countries have negotiated bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with the USA, but the US Congress is to ratify them. US deals with Peru, Panama, Columbia and South Korea still await Congress approval. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAF TA-DR) is faced with US indifference and anti-trade left opinions in the Latin American countries. Peru's trade deal with USA could initiate an extra \$9 billion, in industrial investment in 2008 and 2009. The concept of Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), was being negotiated by the USA and thirty three Latin American and Caribbean countries, a decade earlier. But the Democrats in the American Congress are mistrustful of trade agreements. There are widespread tears that jobs have become more insecure in USA, as a result of globalization. The trade block led by Brazil has withdrawn from FTAA, in favour of the inconclusive Doha round of WTO talks. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez is opposed to free trade.

The US Democrat senators are pursuing changes in the trade agreements. They are insisting that Free Trade Agreements include clauses to strengthen labour rights and the protection of the environment, while liberalizing intellectual-property protection. Domestic policies are affecting the restoration of bipartisan consensus on Trade. The US is worried that Panama's parliament has a head, who is accused of killing a US citizen in 1992. The US argues that Colombia must exercise more efforts to prevent the killing of trade unionists, and to punish officials who are associated with right-wing para-militaries. But failure to approve a FTA may escalate violence from drug traffickers, guerillas and

former para-militaries. If the agreements with Peru and Panama are approved by the US Congress, trade and investment could get diverted from Colombia. Again, if the US Congress ratifies the pending FTAs, at the cost of CAFTA-DR, jobs may be lost in Costa Rica, Bolivia and Ecuador. Much of the \$200 million worth timber exported from Peru is cut illegally. The US Congress Democrats and the Greens are insisting on inclusion of a “timber annexe” in the free trade agreement between USA and Peru.

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With the Gujarat Assembly elections in December '07, there has been a ‘sting’ TV broadcast on ‘Aaj Tak’ channel, compiled by a group of journalists from ‘Tehelka’ magazine. Fourteen main activists of the 2002 riots in Gujarat, which include a sitting BJP MLA from Godhra, a public prosecutor, and VHP or Bajrang Dal activists and leaders, explain their own role and the role of the chief minister, Mr Narendra Mody in the riots. Modi had reportedly given the rioters three days time “to do whatever they wanted”. In certain areas in Ahmedabad like Dariapur, and in Vadadora, Dahod and Surat, the channel had gone off the air, during the TV broadcast.

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The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (K H A D C) has constituted a select committee, to study the feasibility of the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage First Amendment Bill, 2007. The Bill proposes to debar the children of mixed tribal and non-tribal parents of Scheduled Tribe status. No new clans, like the Tang Jait, would be allotted to a non-Khasi woman, who marries a Khasi man.

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