

NEWS WRAP

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Economic resurgence and globalizaion has led to Asian powers fabricating and expanding their navies. There is no indication yet of any arms race. New warships are being justified to withstand terrorists and pirates. USA requires a mighty navy to protect the Malacca strait, the route through which south-east Asia's major oil and other trade cross. China's navy possesses new destroyers, frigates, and sub-marines, fitted with the most advanced kit, some manufactured in China, and some in Russia. China has always endeavoured to build a naval force, with capabilities of challenging US navy Pacific fleet's intervention in any Taiwan war. It would also like to protect its supplies of fuel and raw material, from piracy and terrorism threats. China is about to start the manufacture of aircraft carriers, that would allow it to project airpower across vast distnces. The Chinese naval base on Hainan island will allow Chinese vessels easy access to the Malacca strait and other important South-East Asian shipping lanes.China would have dominance in the Indian Ocean, through ports it is constructing in Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

India seeks port facilities in the South China Sea and Vietnam. To prevent dislocation of sea traffic, India is constructing two air craft carriers, with launch date of 2010. Disputes over refitting is causing delays to a third aircraft carrier purchased from Russia. South Korea is acquiring long range naval capabilities, with new submarines, destroyers and helicopter-carriers. On 30 May 08, North Korea fired three ship-to-ship missiles in the Yellow Sea. Economic resurgence and globalization is driving Asian countries to Naval expansion. These "blue water" navies project power away from home shores. A big navy can provide disaster relief. Laden with relief supplies, warships from USA, Britain and France are off the coast of cyclone-hit Myanmar.

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Despite a ban on surveillance aircraft, by a 1994 cease-fire agreement, Georgia has sent at least three spy drones over Abkhazia since March 08. A UN report has confirmed that the Russian air force had shot down an unmanned Georgian spy drone, flying over the breakaway region of Abkhazia on 30 April 08. Moscow has denied vehemently.

Stand off continues between Georgia and Russia, over Abkhazia, a province of Georgia, that left Tbilisi's control in 1992. Recently Russia despatched reinforcements to Abkhazia, where it has been main-taining a peacekeeping force since 1994. 90% of the population in Abkhazia hold Russian passports. 545 Russian paratroopers were airborne to Tkvarcheli, about 30 km from Kodori valley. The only part of Abkhazia under Georgian control is Kodori valley, which is sorrounded by snow capped mountains. Svans, a mountain tribe, who have a majority in the valley, have been loyal to Georgia.

Earlier controlled by a warlord, the Georgian government reasserted its authority in 2006. The Kodori Gorge was renamed Upper Abkhazia. There has been massive development expenditure in this region. Renovation work has focused on schools and dispensaries. Three small power stations have been built

for electricity to the local settlements. Most people still travel on horseback. Local government headquarters are guarded by armed police, where Georgian and European Union flags are flown. Georgia is keen on NATO membership. Russia in 1999 had signed an agreement under Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, to evacuate the military base at Gudavta, in the North. About 2300 permanent inhabitants live in Kodori Gorge.

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The Indus Waters Treaty (1960) governs the sharing of river waters of Ravi and Beas, between India and Pakistan. India has been releasing more water to the Pakistan side than required under the treaty: excess being about three million acre-feet volume of water. Haryana government had proposed a barrage on the river, close to the Indian border with Pakistan, which would have diverted the excess water to Haryana, for irrigation purposes. However, the proposed second link canal between the Ravi and Beas rivers, has been found unfeasible, as one of the banks of the Ravi river, at the proposed site, lay in Pakistan territory. The proposed canal would have also created water-logging in Punjab. The Central Water Commission has been conducting scientific assessments of the waters, beyond the last monitoring station at Madhopur. To measure the flow of unharnessed water into Pakistan, a suitable site has been identified.

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There is a shortage of over 70,000 civil engineers in India, every year. With massive construction expansion plans, India is building or upgrading over 68,000 km of national highways, more than 35 airports, twenty-four big railway stations, countrywide freight corridors, a new hospitality and housing industry, and infra-structure civil engineering construction. But only one in ten IIT students, opt for civil engineering subject; and only 200 of the 1700 engineering colleges approved by All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) offer the civil engineering course. About 10,000 civil engineers graduate annually, and the combined IITs produce barely 500 to 600 civil engineering graduates, every year. Further, between a third and half of all civil engineering undergraduates either divert from civil engineering, soon after graduation, or enter the cash rewarding IT sector. Over the last few years, private engineering colleges, have either reduced civil engineering seats, or closed down the civil engineering faculty. Civil engineering lost its charm for students with the arrival of IT boom, computer software science, modern electronics, and bio-technology. Colleges have been replacing civil engineering with IT, electronics and communications courses, which offer higher salaries.

The progress and quality of construction of the infra-structure has been affected by the shortage of civil engineers. Only civil engineers are equipped with the knowledge and understanding of concrete, building materials, and reinforcement rods. Experienced civil engineers are valued highly at present. Civil engineers have taken retirement voluntarily from the government sector, and shifted to the private sector, of late. Around 30 to 40% of civil engineering posts in the government sector, including at National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), are lying vacant. Today's civil engineering is dependent on new technology of materials, and computer aided designs. New infrastructure projects

are following the 'public-private partnership' (PPP) models, on 'build-operate-transfer' (BOT) basis; several of which are financed from international sources.

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Located in Bhavnagar district, Alang has become a modern, ecofriendly and labour friendly ship breaking yard. In the first week of June 08, a special container mobile chamber that would ensure environment and worker friendly removal of hazardous material from decommissioned vessels, arrived at Alang, Asia's largest ship breaking yard. In 1998-99, Alang dismantled around 380 ships. It has a capacity to handle 400 vessels each year. Environmental controversies over decommissioning, and breaking up of French aircraft, carrier Le Clemenceau and Norwegian liner 'Blue Lady', and fluctuations in import duties resulted in ship-breaking diverted to Pakistan and Bangladesh. Dismantling of vessels reflected a rise of 30 in 2007-08, compared to the previous year. □□□