

NEWS WRAP

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Iran has stockpiled more than one ton of low-enriched uranium hexafluoride at its Nuclear facility in Natanz, according to a recent UN report. The accumulated uranium, if highly enriched would be enough for a Nuclear weapon. Israel would never accept a Nuclear-armed Iran, and would persuade Syria, which has closed ties with Iran, to stay neutral, in the event of hostilities. Israeli leaders want Syria to stop supplying arms to Hezbollah, the Islamic political and para-military group in Lebanon. Syrian sovereignty has been violated by Israel recently, on three occasions. Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah leader was assassinated in Damascus in Feb 08. The Syrian General Mohammed Suleiman was killed near the Syrian port of Tartous in August 08. Israel conducted a raid on a Nuclear facility in Syria in Sep 07.

Syria's upgraded chemical weapons capability, which is being expanded with the help of North Korean experts, makes Israel vulnerable. Satellite images point to new construction work, at the heavily protected site of at-Safir. Israel needs Mount Hermon, a 4000 ft Israeli outpost overlooking Damascus, for operating radars to look towards Iran. Syria's main demand is that the Golan Heights, seized by Israel in the 1967 war, should be returned to Syria. Reports compiled by Israel's overseas spy agency, Mossad, and by Israeli military intelligence advocate opening of negotiations between Israeli authorities and president Bashar al-Assad of Syria. Israeli intelligence agencies are in favour of a deal to eliminate the risk of war with Syria, and also manipulate a split between Iran and Syria.



While there is occasional talk of independence in the British and French colonies, scattered in the South Atlantic ocean and the Caribbean sea, few voters seek independence from the colonial countries. Periodic financial scandals and an uneasy relationship between a governor appointed by Britain and local political leaders disturb British colonies of Turks and Caicos Islands and Bermuda. These Islands under British protectorate has prospered from finance and tourism.

In the Caribbean, Guadeloupe and its neighbour Martinique, are overseas 'departments' of France. Recently, Guadeloupe was shot down by a general strike, for over four weeks. On 17 Feb 09, a strike leader was shot dead at a barricade, and emergency workers and police trying to rescue him, came under fire. Business offices and shops were looted, and cars burnt. Soon the strike spread to Martinique. The strikers demand a €200 (\$251) increase in monthly wages. Residents of British Turks and Caicos islands have called for royal commissions to investigate corruption of elected premier, Michael Misick.



The Ganga river is being polluted by the sewerage from the ashrams in Rishikesh and Hardwar. The flow of rivers in Uttarakhand has reduced from 995 litres per second in 1993, to 85 litres per second in 2003. The Lohari-Nagpala Hydro-electric project, on the Bhagirathi river at Uttarkashi, being executed by the National Thermal Power Corporation, will further block the unhindered flow of

the Ganga and displace local people. Following local agitation, work on Pala Maneri and Bhairon Ghati Power projects remain suspended.

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Megan Mylan's real world fairy tale, "Smile Pinki" won the Oscar (2008) for the best short documentary category. Shot entirely in Varanasi and villages of Uttar Pradesh, the 39-minute long film focuses on the work of surgeon Dr Subodh Kumar Singh, who provides free surgery to fix the cleft lip of poor young children. The real world fairy tale celebrates Pinki Kumari, whose life is transformed by the simple surgery. Celebrating the Oscar announcements on 24 Feb 08, Varanasi's GS Memorial Plastic Surgery Hospital and Trauma Centre carried out twenty surgeries on children. Born with cleft lips, all these children would be able to smile like Pinki.

"Born into Brothels" directed by Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, won the Oscar (2204) for the best documentary feature. The film highlights the real life story of children of Kolkata's sex workers in Sonagachi. One child, Anjali (name changed) who then in her teens appeared in several photos celebrating the Oscar triumph, is today one of the 5000 full time prostitutes in Sonagachi. The film makers had provided cameras to the children, and taught them to shoot pictures of their lives and environment. In the case of Anjali, art failed to bring hope in a community on the brink of despair, and she is in the same profession as her mother, only months after the Oscar announcements.

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Energy shortfall in India is minus 11.9% (Jan '09), against the requirement of 66,445 million units, availability has been 58,540 mw, leaving a deficit of 7905 million units. Slippages in capacity addition, primarily due to delays in the procurement of plant equipment, fuel linkages and less than the optimum supply of raw material, in the current economic downturn have led to deficits in the targeted generation of additional hydro power. Owing to delays in placement of orders and re-negotiations of prices with buyers, power utilities have missed their coal import targets of twenty million tons in 2008-09.

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The Indian army has killed 1256 ultra militants in 2008. Around 330 ultras were killed and 172 others apprehended in Jammu and Kashmir. The army also "neutralized" 717 ulfa militants in Assam.

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The union government has been collecting funds for afforestation since 2004. The ambitious "Green India" project, involved planting trees worth Rs 9000 crore across India. Recently the Supreme Court has refused to grant approval to the central government for want of a cohesive policy involving various state governments. □□□