

NEWS WRAP

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The technology for nuclear weapons is over sixty- five years old. The materials and the skills for making nuclear weapons being diffused over several countries, 'nuclear free visions' remain unattainable. Except China, the other officially recognized nuclear powers, namely USA, Russia, Britain and France have been reducing their nuclear arsenals. President Barack Obama of USA and President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia recently agreed that a modest cut will accompany new weapons-counting rules, which are to be fixed before 2009 year. Other nuclear dangers have been increasing. The thefts of proliferation prone technologies and materials for bomb making are growing, as more governments opt for civilian nuclear power, as a source of clean electricity. North Korea left the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and exploded a bomb. Iran, though part of the NPT, defied UN calls to halt its suspect nuclear work. China is willing to ratify the comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty if USA also ratifies the ban. Pakistan, India and Israel possess nuclear weapons, but are outside the NPT. Unless India accepts a test ban, Pakistan would never ratify a test ban treaty. While USA and Russia are reaching 1000 nuclear warheads each, other nuclear countries except Britain, are disinclined to place their smaller nuclear arsenals on the negotiating table.

North Korea launched a three stage rocket on 05 April 09. Revolutionary songs were beamed back from the experimental communications satellite. The rocket flew over a main island of Japan. Countries like USA, South Korea and Japan affirm that the launch was a front for testing a Taepo dong-2 intercontinental ballistic missile. Critics do not consider the rocket launch fully successful. The Taepodong-2 missile is capable of carrying nuclear warheads as far as Alaska. While the booster rocket dropped into the Sea of Japan, the rocket's remaining stages, along with payload, crashed into the Pacific, about 3200 kms from the launch-pad. Before the launch USA, South Korea and Japan each deployed destroyers to nearby waters equipped with Aegis anti-missile systems. After the launch, there were US-led efforts to persuade the UN Security Council, to issue a strong condemnation of the launch. But China and Russia supported North Korea's explanations of a satellite launch, and maintained that it was within its rights. Again, North Korea has recently assembled and deployed miniaturised nuclear warheads, for its No dong medium-range missile, which is capable of striking Japan.

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The G-20 summit in London of April 09 did not offer any co-ordinated stimulus nor comprehensive plans to improve the health of banks, as remedies for the global slump. Increased collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is aimed at ferreting out macroeconomic and financial risks. The agreement of the members of the G 20, includes a promise of more money for the IMF, tripling the IMF's resources from \$250 billion to \$750 billion. Till now, only about half the extra money has been pledged, a major portion long before the London summit. A promise to create \$250 billion of Special Drawing Rights, the IMF's quasicurrency, was a main source of new cash. This is expected to increase global liquidity, by expanding countries' reserves. However, the scheme will not

do anything significant to support demand, as most of the SDRs will be stored in the coffers of the world's largest economies. The nations decided to crack down on tax havens, and establish a Financial Stability Board. The G20 members committed themselves to a \$250 billion worth of new global trade guarantees. There were also assurances that there would be a freeze on new protectionist measures. The IMF would be having more resources, to play a broader role in the world economy. The countries did not offer any fresh measures for co-ordinated budgetary stimulus. With shrinking trade the shortfall in trade finance is around \$300 billion. About \$200 billion would be available to support trade finance, from export-credit agencies (ECAs). The G20 expects that up to \$50 billion of "trade liquidity support" would emanate via the World Bank.

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Even though the figures may be an understatement, the Union Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has estimates of approximately 3.9 million Indian citizens residing overseas (Dec 2001). These Indian citizens living abroad still do not have the right to vote in India. Several countries permit their overseas citizens to vote either by post, proxy or in person at the nearest consulate. But for Indians living abroad, only bureaucrats and government officers are entitled to postal ballot. Many of the non-resident Indians, continue to be registered on the electoal rolls in their home states, but are deprived of the right to vote, when elections take place in India. However, the Representation of People's Act (1950) recognizes that citizens who leave their 'ordinary residence' temporarily are not disqualified from voting. But there are no constitutional arrangements, entitling citizens whose names are still on the rolls in their residential constituencies, who left India temporarily, and who intend to return, with the powers and facilities to vote. Geographical detachment has resulted in an abritrary denial of the right to vote to Indian citizens, residing abroad. A bill has been pending in Parliament to enfranchise Indian citizens overseas for several years, but it is yet to become law.

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