

NEWS WRAP

AGD

The bargaining power of Venezuelan petroleum has allowed President Hugo Chavez to forge anti-Washington alliances, as part of a struggle against a global order dominated by USA. The Russian Navy will conduct joint exercises with Venezuela in the Caribbean seas sometime at the end of 2008. The Nuclear powered cruiser "Peter the Great", the flagship of the Russian Baltic fleet, will be sent to the Caribbean. There will be four Russian ships, having a combined crew of 1000. Designed for anti-submarine warfare, an unspecified number of air craft will be stationed temporarily at a Venezuelan air base. The joint naval exercises, will be a counter to the US Fourth Fleet, revived in April 08 to patrol the area ; but which was disbanded in 1950. Angered with the United States for despatching warships to Georgia for delivering aid, Russia sent two bombers to Venezuela on a training mission, in mid-September 08. Venezuela has spent over \$ 4 billion purchasing Russian arms, which includes scores of helicopters, 100,000 Kalashnikov rifles, and 24 Sukhoi-30 fighter bombers.

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Following the election fiascos in Kenya and Zimbabwe, the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) won Angola's first multi-party general election, for sixteen years, winning 80% of the votes cast, to 10% for the main opposition party, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Since its independence, the first multi-party elections were held in Angola in 1992. But after the election results were announced in 1992, UNITA had taken up arms. Peace returned in 2002, after the death of UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi. Though there were short-comings in the elections of September 08, it has been a big step towards democracy. The MPLA had a big electoral advantage with powers of incumbency, large funds resources, and the bias of the state media and institutions. After Nigeria, Angola is sub-Saharan Africa's Second largest oil producer. Angola's economy is the fastest growing in Africa. There is a planned presidential election in 2009.

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There has been a power-sharing deal signed between President Robert Mugabe, heading the Zanu PF party in Zimbabwe, and Mr Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The power-sharing stipulates that Robert Mugabe will remain president, and the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai becomes prime minister. Command over the army will be by Mugabe, while Tsvangirai controls the police. The 31-member cabinet, consisting of 15 members from the Zanu PF party, 13 members from the main opposition, and from a breakaway opposition group is chaired by Mugabe. A new council of ministers in charge of day-to-day administration and policy formulation, is being chaired by Tsvangirai. The MDC has insisted that there will be no general amnesty for Mugabe henchmen, who were responsible for the Matabeleland massacres in the 1980s, whose brutalities still continue.

The Zimbabwe government has accepted that shops could price and sell goods in foreign currency, taking note that inflation is estimated at more than 11 million percent. While doctors and others are demanding their salaries in foreign currency, Mugabe does not have the foreign exchange to pay even the police or army. The new government is required to reform the constitution and hold elections in eighteen months. Forcible land acquisitions in Zimbabwe of the last eight years, which led to the expulsion of about 5000 white farmers, would be "irreversible". With farming and manufacturing, collapsing there is shortage of almost all essential goods, like cooking and heating fuel, and sugar and bread.

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India has been short of uranium, even though it has been dreaming of nuclear self-sufficiency for the past fifty years. But India possesses about one third of the world's known deposits of thorium, which if radiated, could be converted into nuclear fuel. India's thorium deposits could yield about 155,502 gigawatt-years of electrical energy, which amounts to more than fourteen times the wattage, which India could extract from coal deposits.

On 06 September 08, a "waiver" was passed by the Nuclear Suppliers Group, (NSG), a 45-nation cartel that limits trade in nuclear materials and technology, that would allow business with India. Five countries, USA, Britain, China, France and Russia, enjoy Nuclear commerce and

Nuclear weapons, and have signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, unlike India. However, USA and China are yet to ratify the Test Ban Treaty. India's Nuclear reactors require double the uranium its own mines can supply. The "waiver" will permit India to import uranium for its nuclear reactors. More of domestic uranium could be diverted for weapons building. The deal, in future, would allow India to purchase "dual use" technology, for utilization in the nuclear industry and armaments sector. The list of "civil nuclear reactors" is yet to be finalized. Nuclear generated electricity will meet only 5% of India's projected demand. □□□