

# NEWS WRAP

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111 nations adopted the treaty banning cluster bombs at the end of May 08, even though leading cluster bomb makers like USA, Russia, China, Isreal and Pakistan, boycotted the talks, and stated that they would not sign the treaty. But all countries were inclined to agree that they would never use the weapons again. The countries which did not sign the treaty, defended the cluster bombs, which spread a carpet on a battlefied, for its high military value. Cluster bombs leave at large, unexploded bombs, that could maim or kill civilians. The Treaty ensures that there would be international condemnation on any country, that showers cluster munitions. However the Treaty, has an American clause, that members "may engage in military cooperation and operations" with a nation that rejects the treaty, and "engages in activities prohibited" by the Treaty. So long as the caller member of the Treaty does not "expressly request the use of cluster munitions", a Treaty member could request for US air power or artillery support, that uses cluster bombs.

The British government has agreed to discard the two types of cluster weapons with British forces. It also agreed to request USA to remove cluster bombs based on British soil. Since most US military units possess cluster bombs, USA has claimed that the treaty could endanger US participation in joint peacekeeping operations and disaster relief schemes. Of course the Treaty has been signed by countries, which do not engage in wars.

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As part of its war on terror, the US government is detaining at least 26,000 people without trial, in secret prisons. Around 80,000 detainees have been through the "system", since 2001. An analysis by the human rights organization, 'Reprieve', points to more than 200 new cases of rendition since 2006, when President George Bush had declared that the practice had ceased. In an attempt to conceal the numbers and the whereabouts of the detainees, USA is alleged to be operating "floating prisons" of ships, for those arrested in the anti-terror war. There have been debates in USA and UK, over the use of ships to detain prisoners. Research by 'Reprieve' indicates that 17 ships have been used as "floating prisons" since 2001. On board these ships, detainees are interrogated, and then rendered to undisclosed locations.

'USS Bataan' and 'USS Peleliu' have held prisoners. USA and UK utilized the British Territory of Diego Garcia in the Indian Occan, as a military base. 15 ships with prisoners have operated around Diego Garcia. In early 2007, many people were abducted and interrogated by Somali, Kenyan and Ethiopian forces in a systematic operation. Interrogations were conducted by the CIA and FBI, on the 'USS Ashland' and other ships, in the Gulf of Aden, during that time. More than 100 individuals "disappeared" to prisons in Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Guantamo Bay. The individuals put on ships for interrogation, were herded in the bottom of the ships.

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Driven by the prospect for oil and gas reserves, made accessible by the melting of the polar ice cap, there has been a hectic scramble for the Arctic. Five Arctic Nations, namely, Russia, USA, Norway, Denmark and Canada have recently signed an agreement in Greenland, whereby the five nations would abide by the 1982 US convention on the law of the sea, which determines territorial claims, according to coastlines and undersea continental shelves. By 2020, a UN panel would decide on control of the Arctic. However, Iceland, Finland and Sweden, which are part of the Arctic council group of nations but without territorial claims, have been excluded from claims to the continental shelf at the pole. Similarly, environmental group and the native Inuit have been excluded from the resolution of territorial disputes.

In contrast, the Treaty applied to the Antarctic, prevents drilling or military activity. As the Arctic melts, Denmark and Russia are claiming the Lomonosov ridge, under the north pole, as part of their territory. Denmark endeavours to prove the ridge as a geological extension of Greenland, a self governing Danish territory. Melting of icecaps and increase in the number of icebergs, will lead to a rise in shipping, and the shipping lanes. The Arctic declaration assures co-operation, in the event of marine accidents.

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Nepal Sugauli had ceded an area of 18,000 sq km to the British, under the Treaty of Sugauli (1815). This territory extends over parts of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarkhand, Sikkim and Darjeeling districts. The Dooars area (Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts in Bengal) and Assam, came into British possession by a Treaty with Bhutan in 1860. Residing in these areas, the Gurkha population became a part of then British India. For centuries, Indian Gurkhas have been residents of India. Besides the Indian Gurkhas, Nepalis came to India, under the provisions of the 1950 India-Nepal Treaty of Friendship, that allows Nepalese citizens to work, purchase property and settle in India. In 1907, the Gurkha Hillmen's Association demanded from the British, an administrative set-up distinct from Bengal. The undivided Communist Party of India had demanded in 1946, that Gorkhastan be constituted in the Darjeeling areas. From 1986, the Gurkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) has taken up the issue of a separate state for Gurkhas, based on the ethnic, cultural and linguistic distinctions, between the population of Darjeeling and rest of West Bengal.

While Subhas Ghising's GNLF wanted the 6th Schedule of the Indian constitution, with enhanced autonomy powers for the tribal-majority areas, falling under the Hill Council; Bimal Gurung's Gurkha Janamukti Morcha (JMM) has demanded full Statehood. JMM's Gurkhaland envisages not only the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong, but also Siliguri and parts of the Dooars, falling under Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts, in North Bengal, pushing upto the river Sunkosh on the Bhutan border. The agitations over the last two months have been marked by indefinite bandhs, suspension of road traffic, harassment to tourists and violent clashes. □□□