

# **NEWS WRAP**

**AGD**

A ground-breaking deal between India and Washington in 2009, provided India recognition as a defacto member of the global nuclear weapons club. State owned companies from France and Russia, have already signed a series of deals, to construct power plants in India. At New Delhi in March 2010, Russia's Prime Minister signed deals for Russia to build upto 16 reactors, at three different sites. The state owned Nuclear Power Corporation of India remains the owner and operator of Nuclear reactors, even those built by foreign companies. The US energy companies, including Westinghouse, GE and Babcock and Wilson, are willing to conduct any nuclear commerce with India, until New Delhi adopts legislation to place caps on the liability of the private sector. The US-India Business Council feels that such legislation is required to build an 'enabling framework for private participation'.

In March 2010, India's Congress party led government tried to introduce in parliament, a controversial legislation, limiting the liability of foreign nuclear reactor suppliers, in case of a nuclear accident. Angry opposition parties caused a furore over the proposed legislation, which would have barred any Indian victims of nuclear accident, from suing foreign equipment suppliers, either in India or through foreign courts, and would relieve foreign companies of direct liability, for any accident. Some liability could be written into suppliers' contracts with Indian state companies, that would be capped at Rupees 5 billion (\$ 110 million). The draft legislation would have allowed US nuclear companies to evade responsibility, for any accident.

## **US RECESSION AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

While recession in USA ended in mid 2009, the US economy lost more than a million jobs in the second half of 2009. Firms are extracting more productivity out of their workers, which is reflected in the divergence of output and employment. During 2009, labour productivity in USA grew remarkably at around 7%. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total market value of output; while another indicator, Gross Domestic Income (GDI) adds up wages, profits and taxes. Current GDI figures continue to contract, while GDP figures point to an increase. Staff working harder for higher productivity, delays in new hiring, high unemployment point to a slow and jobless exit from US recession.

## **MYANMAR'S ETHNIC MINORITIES**

The ethnic Burman majority rule Myanmar, and the ethnic minorities who make up 30% of Myanmar's 58 million population, have never been at peace. Since 1949, the Karen guerillas have been fighting for separate homeland. While there are no accurate estimates of how many have died, there are around 103,000 UN-recognized Myanmarese refugees in Thailand. Hundreds of thousands of additional refugee camps are not even registered. Driven out of Myanmar by the constant battles and by the economic mismanagement of the ruling generals, life for about two million Myanmarese refugees in Thailand, has been constant upheaval. Refugees in the Myanmar villages are caught in the middle of the

fighting, and are often used by the militias as porters or forced labour. The refugee camps are spread out on barren hilltops in western Thailand, overlooking the Moei river and the thickly forested mountains of Myanmar's Karen state. The Karen separatists are battling the world's longest running insurgency.

Of late Myanmar's military government has been pushing hard to defeat the Karen insurgents, before elections due in later 2010. The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the local pro-government militia, has intensified its offensive against Karen guerillas and villagers, driving thousands over the border with Thailand, into camps such as Nang Bua. The refugees in Thailand are unwanted and lead miserable lives. The Thai authorities allowed the Karen to operate across the border with little interference, for years. The refugees were used as a foil against the army generals, who govern Myanmar. The Thais are now moving away from their buffer policy, and are cracking down increasingly on the Karen rebels. The Thai authorities attempted to repatriate the refugees of Nong Bua in Feb 2010, but were stopped after an international outcry. As Myanmar prepares for the elections, the Myanmar government and its militia proxies have become more active. A constitution passed by Myanmar generals, two years earlier, guarantees the military 25% of the seats in parliament. The Myanmar authorities are trying to extend their control, over Myanmar's fractious border areas, which are full of landmines and roaming pro-government militias.

#### **AFTER IRAQI VOTE**

The 07 March 2010 vote for parliament, in Iraq points to a collapse in support for many former exiles who collaborated with USA, after the 2003 invasion. Iraq's balance of power may be realigned, with the followers of Moktada al-Sadr, a radical cleric who led the Shite insurgency against the US occupation, emerging as the second largest group, after the followers of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, the largest Shiite bloc. While remaining steadfast in opposition to any ties with the United States, the Sadr Shiite movement has accepted the political process. With representation increasing in the Iraq parliament, Sadrism power is also bound to increase. The Sadrists may wield a Shiite bloc, roughly the same size as the Kurds, who have served as chief schemers in governing coalitions since 2005. The Sadrists believe that the governing alliance's leadership should be theirs. The Sadrists have refused any contact with the American military or diplomats, since 2003. More nationalist than other religious shiite parties, the Sadrists may prove less pliable for Iran.

The Kurdish bloc has been weakened, with a new Kurdish opposition group, Goran (Change) gaining ground. The Kurdish vote is likely to spilt in the Iraq parliament. The balance in wider alliance could still be held by smaller parties.

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