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ON
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Pelosi's Chinese Climate Change

Speaker Nancy Pelosi took her climate crusade to China last week, urging that "we must work together" to address what she called this "urgent challenge." Her junket won't change many Chinese minds but it does speak volumes about her party's changing priorities.

Back when Mrs. Pelosi was a rising liberal star her signature issue was human rights in China. In 1991, she famously unfurled a pro-democracy banner in Tiananmen Square. During the Clinton Administration, she argued against normalizing trade relations with China unless linked to human-rights progress. Yet throughout last week's China tour Mrs. Pelosi said nothing of note about human rights—despite the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen

massacre this week.

Mrs. Pelosi told us in a brief interview in Hong Kong that she had raised human rights "privately" with Chinese leaders. She explained that her previous human rights lobbying had been in a "personal capacity" as a mere Congresswoman, but now that she is Speaker she "speaks for Congress" and has to take a softer approach. That argument would be more credible had Mrs. Pelosi not regularly excoriated Republican Presidents for not doing more

about Tibet and the other billion or so Chinese who lack basic political freedoms.

The reality is that her former convictions have fallen to the new liberal imperative of saving the world from carbon: "Workers rights, human rights, people's rights are part of environmental justice," she declared, in language that the leaders

of a "People's Republic" can appreciate. With China now the world's No. 1 CO₂ emitter, Democrats are desperate to sign up China for the follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol lest the exercise again be pointless.

A student at a Beijing university returned fire, asking Mrs. Pelosi what could be done that might convince American voters and Congress to cut back on emissions. "We have so much room for improvement," Mrs. Pelosi replied, according to the Associated Press. "Every aspect of our lives must be subjected to an inventory . . . of how we are taking responsibility."

At least she's honest about what her climate project would really mean state-side. Most Democrats have a kind of global-warming split personality: On the one hand, New York will be underwater unless we create millions of new green jobs by imposing a cap-and-trade tax. Yet they also ridicule anyone who points

out that their carbon limits will result in huge new taxes and costs for people who use electricity, drive cars, buy groceries—which is say, everyone.

Speaking earlier in Shanghai, the Speaker elaborated: "I think that from what I've heard so far from the Chinese side of this—and I think we're all in this together—that the economic aspects of it are very, very important to the Chinese as well." The Speaker was talking about "green investment," though what Beijing actually wants is for developed nations to hobble their own economies with a cap-and-tax regime that would send jobs and billions of dollars a year in transfer payments to China the way Kyoto has. So the Chinese economy would be more efficient, while the West would be less competitive.

Whatever Chinese leaders do collectively on climate change, they must be relieved that Mrs. Pelosi no longer wants to press very hard for individual rights.

**Carbon
reduction
trumps human
rights.**

Malaysia, China consider ending trade in dollars

BY SHAI OSTER

BELJING—Malaysia's prime minister said China and his country are considering conducting their trade in Chinese yuan and Malaysian ringgit, joining a rising number of nations thinking of phasing out the dollar.

"We can consider whether we can use local currencies to facilitate trade financing between our two countries," Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak told reporters at a briefing Wednesday after meeting with China's premier, Wen Jiabao.

"What worries us is that the [U.S.] deficit is being financed by printing more money," Mr. Najib said. "That is what is happening. The Treasury in the United States is printing more notes."

China has been promoting the idea of replacing the dollar as the global currency, suggesting that a basket of currencies less linked to the fate of one economy would make more sense. It also has been talking about using the yuan for trade settlements, starting gradually in the region and then expanding farther abroad.

On Monday, U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner urged China to move toward a more-flexible exchange rate for the yuan. If the yuan were to strengthen, that would increase China's domestic buying power and reduce the country's dependence on exports.

Chinese trading partner Brazil is also looking at reducing its exposure to the dollar by conducting its trade with China in yuan.

Despite countries' growing interest in adopting the yuan—fostered by China's growing economic clout and worries about the U.S. government's deficit spending—many experts agree it would take a long time to liberalize China's currency enough to be used as a global benchmark. Right now it's difficult to buy and sell yuan outside China.

Malaysia's Mr. Najib, speaking on the second day of a four-day visit to Beijing, timed to coincide with the 35th anniversary of diplomatic ties established by Mr. Najib's father, said the two countries signed a series of framework agreements meant to facilitate trade and investment.

Mr. Najib, who is also finance minister, has been struggling to revive Malaysia's export-dependent economy. In April, he unveiled measures to liberalize the country's finance sector, allowing greater foreign investment and rolling back some of the decades-old preferential policies granted to elevate the country's majority Muslim Malay population, which helped them compete with the ethnic Chinese.

Last week, the government sharply revised down its annual gross-domestic-product forecast to a contraction of between 4% and 5%, versus an earlier estimate of a 1% decline. Analysts now predict the nation's fiscal deficit could rise to 8% of GDP, the highest level in a decade.

But Mr. Najib ruled out more stimulus spending. "We've introduced one of the biggest in the world—as a percentage of GDP it's 9%. But there's a limit to which we can introduce fiscal stimulus," he said.



Najib
Abdul Razak

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Banker sees recovery in Asia

*Malaysia bank chief
says stable finances
aid region's outlook*

BY ANDREW BATSON

BEIJING—Asian economies are poised to recover earlier from the global downturn than others are, thanks to the region's stable financial systems and new efforts to boost domestic demand, Malaysia's central bank governor said Wednesday.

"I believe that the Asian region holds the greatest promise for generating growth earlier than other parts of the world," Zeti Akhtar Aziz, governor of Bank Negara Malaysia, said in an interview in Beijing where she was attending a conference. Asian countries are working more closely together than before to support each other, she said, which should contribute to a more balanced global economy.

"Of course we did not escape the

economic contraction that occurs through the trade channel, but our financial systems remain sound and solid," she said. In April, bank lending grew 10.6% from a year earlier in Malaysia, and 29.7% in China, according to central bank figures. With credit expansion, "we have the opportunity when conditions stabilize to resume stronger growth," Ms. Zeti said.

Malaysia's economy shrank 6.2% in the first quarter of 2009 as exports collapsed, but those of China, India, Indonesia and Vietnam continued to grow. The International Monetary Fund forecasts Asia's emerging economies to grow 3.3% this year, compared to an expected contraction of 1.3% in the global economy.

Dr. Zeti said financial reforms made after the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis helped improve banks' risk management and alleviate the impact of the current downturn. "It would have been very much worse if

we had a fragmented and fragile financial system," she said.

Still, the downturn has exposed how many Asian countries have been heavily dependent on consumer spending in the U.S. and Europe for fast growth. Dr. Zeti said it's clear adjustments are needed in Asia's economies. "You cannot just focus on continued export-led growth," she said. "One of the new strategies of Asia is to promote domestic demand."

Malaysia has made some progress, Dr. Zeti said, noting that consumption now accounts for 53% of its economy, compared with 42% a decade ago. "We're reducing savings and increasing consumption," she said, arguing

that Asian countries' stable financial systems will make it easier for them to lift consumer spending in coming years. "Of course these things cannot happen overnight, but the trend is there, and this trend will intensify," she said.



Zeti
Akhtar Aziz

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Malaysia deficit worries spur Fitch to cut rating

REUTERS NEWS SERVICE

KUALA LUMPUR—Fitch Ratings cut Malaysia's long-term local-currency rating to single-A from single-A-plus on concerns over the growing budget deficit.

Fitch changed its outlook for the debt to stable from negative and said it was worried about both the deficit and revenue collection.

"By 2010, Malaysia's general government primary deficit of minus 6.4 percent of gross domestic product will be amongst the worst in all Fitch-rated sovereigns after only Latvia, Bahrain, Ireland and Vietnam," Fitch said.

Malaysia has been running steadily increasing budget deficits in recent years. Fitch said the ratio of Malaysia's government revenue to GDP was 21.6%, lower than the 10-year average of 35% for its peers, and that the ratio will worsen to 19% by 2010.

Malaysia is dependent on oil, and there is little chance the country's unpopular government will widen the revenue, Fitch said. The next elections are due by 2013.

The ringgit fell on news of the downgrade, trading as weak as 3.533 per dollar compared with levels around 3.517 before the downgrade.

Geithner's good start in Beijing

But the G2, on its own, cannot solve the world's problems

The US and China are locked in a teetering dance, each grudgingly matching one another's first steps. This week, in a speech at the start of his visit to Beijing, Tim Geithner, US Treasury secretary, set out a plan for how this relationship can develop into a more graceful arrangement. Mending the world economy, however, must go beyond mere bilateral talks.

Mr Geithner's speech was geared towards both US and Chinese audiences. He sent a reassuring message to China, the largest buyer of US government debt, about his plans to cut the fiscal deficit. By setting out his stall first, the Treasury secretary managed to avoid the impression of being an incorrigible wastrel, summoned to see his suspicious bank manager.

Mr Geithner also noted that China needed to change its economic model. Beijing does need to move away from its export-orientation. But, by acknowledging that the US is equally responsible for the world's economic imbalances, he made his case without upsetting his hosts. This was no mean feat.

In the run-up to the crisis, Chinese strip mills fed American strip mills. Chinese savings financed American consumption. In the future, the US must save more and the Chinese people

must create more final demand.

This is easier said than done. If China stops financing the US deficit or US consumers stop spending too rapidly, the crisis will enter a new, darker chapter. In the longer term, making China less parsimonious and the US less voracious means re-engineering both economies. Re-establishing habits of thrift in America will be painful; no one wants to cut consumption.

Chinese demand is limited by workers' income, which is a mere 40 per cent of national output. Demand also suffers because, lacking a robust social security system, Chinese consumers save up as insurance against illness and unemployment. Building a social safety net and redistributing money from Chinese corporations to workers would mark a generational shift with serious consequences for the elite.

In the short term, China and the US can do only so much. The G2 is the world's most important bilateral relationship; it accounts for 31 per cent of world output and a quarter of its trade. While their relationship is crucial, the world cannot be brought back into kilter by these two Goliaths on their own. Global economics is a multilateral affair today, a dance with several partners. Mr Geithner and his hosts should bear that in mind.

US-China

Geithner put on spot as balance of power shifts

News analysis

Treasury chief's calls for reform in Beijing are now accompanied by self-criticism, writes Kathrin Hille

If Tim Geithner did not realise it already, the US Treasury secretary found out on his first official visit to Beijing yesterday that he is dealing with a more self-confident, and sceptical, China.

After a speech at Peking University, Mr Geithner faced tough questions about US failures that contributed to the global financial crisis, as well as demands that China should now be treated as an equal in global economic issues.

One student suggested that, given the US's need for economic support from China, he should in return advise Washington to stop selling weapons to Taiwan. Another asked if China's investments in US government securities were secure.

Some of the concern about the outlook for the US economy was echoed in his first round of talks with Chinese financial officials. Wang Qishan, vice-premier, also brought up the safety of China's financial assets. "What is important to me is the issue of our investments in US debt," he said, according to a person

present at the talks.

Mr Geithner got off to a rocky start in his relations with China earlier this year when, in his confirmation hearings, he accused Beijing of "manipulating" its currency.

But yesterday he struck a diplomatic tone. For every point he made about the need for China to restructure its economy, he matched it with self-criticism about US economic weaknesses or a pledge of reform.

He tried to reassure his audience at Peking University that the US would do what was necessary to bring its budget under control, reducing the fiscal deficit to about 3 per cent of gross domestic product.

"The president in his initial budget to Congress made it clear that, as soon as recovery is firmly established, we are going to have to bring our fiscal deficit down to a level that is sustainable over the medium term," he said.

He told the audience that temporary investments and tax incentives aimed at stimulating private demand would eventually expire. "We will have to be very disciplined in limiting future commitments through the reintroduction of budget disciplines, such as pay-as-you go rules," he said. In addition, he promised to build a system of financial regulation that would be more conservative and give higher priority to protecting consumers.

His remarks were aimed

at addressing concern in Beijing, emphasised repeatedly by officials in recent months, that the US's ballooning public debt could trigger inflation and a depreciation of the dollar and put China's financial investments in jeopardy. With about 70 per cent of its near \$2,000bn (£1,428bn, £1,250bn) reserves tied up in US government assets, China is the largest foreign holder of Treasury bonds.

However, Mr Geithner also told his audience that the economic crisis meant China would have to make changes to its own growth model, reducing the importance it has placed on exports. "In the US, saving rates will have to increase, and the purchases of US consumers cannot be as dominant a driver of growth as they have been in the past," he said.

"Growth [in China] that is sustainable will require a very substantial shift from external to domestic demand." Such a shift would require a more flexible currency regime.

Mr Geithner also pledged support for a bigger Chinese role in international financial institutions, "that was commensurate with China's importance in the global economy".

As part of the increasingly active stance that China has taken in international economic affairs as a result of the crisis, Beijing has proposed the eventual replacement of the US dollar as the global reserve currency by a basket of cur-

rencies and commodities.

Although few economists believe such an idea will be adopted in the short-term, Mr Geithner's young audience yesterday were convinced this crisis has created a shift in the global balance of power.

"His visit shows the importance they attach to us," said Yang Gui, an economics student. "Following the financial crisis, the weights in the global political economy have changed - the US can no longer just preach to China to reform."

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IMF urges Indonesia to tighten up on inflation

Response to global
crisis praised

Economic growth
estimate raised

By John Aglionby in Jakarta

Indonesia needs to bring inflation under tighter control and scrap policies that restrict spending in order to consolidate its nascent economic recovery, the International Monetary Fund has advised after its annual review of south-east Asia's largest economy.

But the IMF praised the Indonesian government and central bank for their response to the global financial crisis and raised its estimate for economic growth this year to 3-4 per cent from 2.5 per cent.

Thomas Rumbaugh, the IMF mission leader, told the Financial Times that sound policies and a stable political environment had helped Indonesia attract comparatively more foreign capital as the global risk appetite had picked up.

However, he cautioned that the fortunate timing of April's five-yearly legislative elections also played a role in the country achieving 4.4 per cent growth, year on year, in the first quarter of 2009.

He said the 1.6m candidates and 38 parties injected enormous sums into the economy at a time when the government's stimulus package and central bank's rate cutting had yet to have an impact.

The government has launched a Rp73,300bn

(\$7.3bn, €5.3bn, £4.6bn) stimulus package, while the central bank allowed the rupiah to weaken from 9,500 to the US dollar to almost 13,000 in October and then gradually cut interest rates as the economy improved.

Last Friday the rupiah strengthened to above 10,000 to the US dollar for the first time since last October.

Bank Indonesia cut its benchmark rate 25 basis points last week to 7 per cent, down 250 basis points from December.

Mr Rumbaugh said he thought easing was now at or near an end, particularly considering the inflation forward indicators, such as rising commodity prices.

Inflation is currently 6.04 per cent, year on year. The IMF expects it to fall to 5 per cent for 2009, low by Indonesian standards but higher than the regional average.

Mr Rumbaugh said: "I think the [economic and monetary authorities] would strengthen the credibility of their macroeconomic policy if they could get inflation down and reduce its volatility."

He added that they also needed to create more fiscal space to spend more money on infrastructure and social protection.

"The revenue ratios are still very low. The number of registered taxpayers is very low."

"They've made some good progress in the last couple of years in that area but they've got a long way to go."

Bankruptcies in Japan down on the year

Hopes rise over stimulus measures

By Michiyo Nakamoto
in Tokyo and
Justine Lau in Hong Kong

Bankruptcies in Japan fell last month for the first time in a year, raising hopes that the government's emergency stimulus measures are helping to ease the effects of the global crisis.

The number of company failures in May declined 6.7 per cent year-on-year to 1,203, the lowest level in a year, according to Tokyo Shoko Research, a credit and market research group.

The statistics follow other encouraging signs that the economy may be over the worst and that financial markets are recovering.

Japan suffered a 4 per cent contraction in gross domestic product in the first three months of the year, its worst performance since the second world war.

But industrial production in April rose 5.2 per cent from the previous month, the fastest rise in more than half a century.

Meanwhile, the drop in exports eased in April, falling 40.6 per cent year-on-year compared with 46.5 per cent in March.

Growth in bank lending,

which has risen amid a sharp contraction in capital market activity, also slowed for the fifth straight month, the Bank of Japan said yesterday, reflecting a recovery in the corporate bond and commercial paper markets.

The decline in bankruptcies reflects the effect of the government's emergency loan guarantee programme, Tokyo Shoko said in its report. Under the scheme, the government has set aside ¥30,000bn in loan guarantees to encourage financial institutions to lend to companies.

Financial institutions have provided ¥10,997.5bn in loans under the pro-

gramme, which started at the end of October.

Teikoku Data Bank noted that bankruptcies declined month-on-month for the second month running and the pace of increase in bankruptcies was slowing in a sign that "the government's emergency measures, including the emergency loan guarantees, is gradually having an effect".

Other government measures appear to be having an effect as well. The number of bankruptcies among construction companies fell 21.3 per cent in May, marking the third month of year-on-year declines, Tokyo Shoko said.

OECD senses recovery in biggest economies

By Daniel Pimlott in London

Most of the world's big economies are close to emerging from recession, according to data published yesterday by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that pointed to a possible recovery by the end of the year.

The Paris-based organisation reported in its latest monthly analysis of forward-looking indicators that a "possible trough" had been reached in April in more developed countries that make up almost three quarters of the world's gross domestic product.

The composite index for 30 economies rose 0.5 points in April, the second monthly rise in a row, after falling for the previous 21 months. The index seeks to identify turning points in the cycle about six months in advance.

The OECD said its overall measure of advanced member countries – ranging from the eurozone and the UK to the US, Mexico and Japan – now pointed to "recovery" instead of the "strong slowdown" they had been suffering since last August.

"It is still too early to assess whether it is a temporary or a more durable turning point," the organisation said. But the data "point to a reduced pace of deterioration in most of the OECD economies with stronger signals of a possible trough in Canada, France, Italy and the United Kingdom".

The improved global outlook came amid evidence that the US jobs market strengthened in May for the first time in 16 months. The Conference Board said its employment trends index moved up to 89.9 last month from 89.7 in April. This follows data last week that showed the US shed far fewer jobs than expected in May.

Crisis? What crisis? The market confounds the left



Philip Stephens

Surely it was only yesterday that the west was engulfed by the crisis of capitalism? Markets buckled under the strains of the credit crunch. Portraits of Adam Smith made way for freshly-burnished busts of John Maynard Keynes. Popular rage against greedy bankers promised to restore politics to parties of the left.

Pace the doomsayers who predicted imminent Armageddon, liberal market capitalism has survived: somewhat humbled and, in the case of the financial services industry under much tighter official supervision, but recognisably much as it was. Governments have stepped in to prop up markets rather than to dismantle them. Nationalising the banks has been a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

The global economy is still in shaky condition. Recovery will be long and painful – and not just in those countries where prosperity had been built on the feeble foundations of unrestrained credit. Britain is paying the price of its borrowing spree in the ruinous state of its public finances; prudent Germany faces a still deeper economic slump because of the collapse of its export markets. Bailing out the banks has meant turning private profligacy into public debt.

That said, predictions of a return to the 1930s have proved as misjudged as the reckless complacency of policymakers and economists during the boom years. This week banks started paying back some of the money they borrowed from taxpayers. As for the predicted

lurch to the left, it has not materialised. I have not seen anyone rushing to imitate the Russian model of state capitalism.

True, the economic crisis cemented Barack Obama's claim on the US presidency. But the Democrats would have won anyway. The Republicans were finished before the collapse of Lehman Brothers. Mr Obama, in any event, promised to fix the economy, not to turn it over to socialism.

In Europe, the imagined crisis of capitalism has turned into an implosion rather than a resurgence in the fortunes of the ideological foes of the free market. Last week's elections to the European parliament, held across 27 countries, told the story. The results showed voters flocking to parties of the centre-right. Socialists and social democrats almost everywhere received a drubbing.

Among the principal winners at the polls were Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats in Germany, Nicolas Sarkozy's centre-right UMP in France and the Italian Silvio Berlusconi's People of Liberty coalition. Socialists in office and in opposition crashed to defeat.

The government of Spain's José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was defeated; Gordon Brown's Labour administration in Britain was humiliated. The Social Democrat partners in Ms Merkel's coalition government took only a fifth of the vote. The socialist opposition in France fared even worse.

To the extent that the elections saw a backlash against global capitalism, it came in gains recorded by smaller, extreme-right parties. The advance of xenophobes in countries such as the Netherlands, Hungary and Britain was cause for dismay. But it did not much change the bigger political picture.

The failures of the centre-left parties each have a particular explanation. The French socialists

have for some years been imprisoned by infighting and weighed down by obsolete ideology; Ms Merkel has consistently outplayed her centre-left coalition partner. The Italian left is floundering in the face of a prime minister who has ruined his country's reputation abroad but retains solid support at home.

Socialists and social democrats have been outflanked as their opponents have moved quickly to occupy political space that might have been claimed by the left. Why should voters turn leftwards when Ms Merkel and Mr Sarkozy have sounded as indignant as any about the shenanigans of "Anglo-Saxon" capitalism?

It has helped, of course, that the European model of welfare capitalism has always been the

Why should voters turn leftwards when Merkel and Sarkozy have been as indignant as any about 'Anglo-Saxon' capitalism?

property as much of the continent's Christian, as of its Social Democrats. Ms Merkel's disdain for hedge funds and Mr Sarkozy's tirades against market fundamentalism have struck reassuring notes among voters.

There was something more to the election results, though, than the tactical adroitness of the centre-right. Support for the market economy has proved resilient. Disillusioned as they are with the excesses – and enraged as they should be by the larceny of some bankers – Europeans have not been clamouring for command-and-control capitalism.

If they are now suffering from the contagion that is the downside of globalisation, they show no great enthusiasm to surrender the upside.

Granted there have been growing calls for governments to bail out faltering industries. As unemployment climbs further, the siren calls of economic nationalism will probably be louder. But Europeans have also become accustomed to globalisation's gains: the flat-screen televisions and personal computers, the cheap clothing and the abundant food.

In the privacy of the voting booth, a majority concluded that if the market system needed fixing it was sensible to entrust the task to politicians with demonstrable competence. Demands from the left (and from the far right) to raise the drawbridge against globalisation won only patchy support.

The voters want it both ways: protection against the unavoidable insecurities of economic integration and access to all the advantages of globalisation. But whoever said electorates were consistent? The answer is active rather than big government – calculated to preserve open markets while providing a buffer against the shocks.

This is the insight that parties of the centre-left need to rediscover. Much as the global crisis has severely damaged confidence in the invisible hand of the market, voters do not want to see it replaced by the clunking fist of an over-mighty state. I detect precious little appetite across Europe for higher taxes.

What was missing last week was a centre-left prospectus recognising the benefits of globalisation while promoting wider distribution of its opportunities. A helping hand, if you like. Beating up on capitalism may satisfy old ideological prejudices but it does not answer the demands of voters for prosperity and fairness. The market's resilience rests on a capacity to adapt. There is a lesson there for the left.

philip.stephens@ft.com

Climate change for richer and poorer

Give developing countries reasons to do their part

For now, we have hot air – not what you want when the topic for debate is CO₂ emissions. But, only months before December's Copenhagen meeting, where 181 countries are supposed to slug out a post-Kyoto protocol, bluster inevitably outweighs real concessions.

The biggest impasse is between China and the US, which together emit 40 per cent of the world's carbon. The US is considering legislation that would cut emissions by 16-17 per cent from current levels by 2020 – roughly flat on 1990 levels, Kyoto's baseline year. Japan this week went slightly better, offering an 8 per cent cut from 1990. The European Union offers 20 per cent; but with the EU already making good headway on cuts, this is a lesser concession than it looks.

China and India are dismissive. Beijing has raised the stakes by urging rich countries to cut emissions 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, and to pay huge sums to help poor countries cope with climate change. But everyone, China included, knows this is unrealistic. Its tough stance is an opening gambit, not a target outcome.

That stance is based on old arguments, but they are not less potent for being well-worn. The west has been polluting for 200 years and China's per capita emissions are only one-fifth of those of the US.

Some 40 per cent of Chinese energy use produces exports for western consumers. That Beijing has logic and morality on its side, however, does not mean we will not all perish by applying them.

Not all is lost. China, and even India, are doing more than they are letting on. But they cannot be seen as being lectured by the west: much of their tough talk is for domestic display. So neither wants to be penned in by binding commitments – but they do want to be more energy-efficient and less polluting. Notwithstanding the smog hanging over Chinese cities, Beijing really is trying to implement stricter environmental standards.

Developing countries will not accept absolute cuts. But there is talk behind the scenes of China "bending the curve" – slowing the rate of increase. That would be a start. The best outcome would be if poor-country emitters were willing to quantify such promises.

To achieve this, rich countries must lead. They must put money on the table so poor countries see financial gains from combating climate change. They should also offer genuine research and technology collaboration – cheap, but symbolically important for countries such as China. If rich countries move, they may find China and others are willing to respond.

Reagan did it



**Paul
Krugman**

"This bill is the most important legislation for financial institutions in the last 50 years. It provides a long-term solution for troubled thrift institutions.... All in all, I think we hit the jackpot." So declared Ronald Reagan in 1982, as he signed the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act.

He was, as it happened, wrong about solving the problems of the thrifts. On the contrary, the bill turned the modest-sized troubles of savings-and-loan institutions into an utter catastrophe. But he was right about the legislation's significance. And as for that jackpot — well, it finally came more than 25 years later, in the form of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

For the more one looks into the origins of the current disaster, the clearer it becomes that the key wrong turn — the turn that made crisis inevitable — took place in the early 1980s, during the Reagan years.

Attacks on Reaganomics usually focus on rising inequality and fiscal irresponsibility. Indeed, Reagan ushered in an era in which a small minority grew vastly rich, while working families saw only meager gains. He also broke with longstanding rules of fiscal prudence.

On the latter point: Traditionally, the U.S. government ran significant budget deficits only in times of war or economic emergency. Federal debt as a percentage of G.D.P. fell steadily from the

end of World War II until 1980. But indebtedness began rising under Reagan; it fell again in the Clinton years, but resumed its rise under the Bush administration, leaving us ill prepared for the emergency now upon us.

The increase in public debt was, however, dwarfed by the rise in private debt, made possible by financial deregulation. The change in America's financial rules was Reagan's biggest legacy. And it's the gift that keeps on taking.

The immediate effect of Garn-St. Germain, as I said, was to turn the thrifts from a problem into a catastrophe. The S. & L. crisis has been written out of the Reagan hagiography, but the fact is that deregulation in effect gave the industry — whose deposits were federally insured — a license to gamble with taxpayers' money, at best, or simply to loot it, at worst. By the time the government closed the books on the affair, taxpayers had lost \$130 billion, back when that was a lot of money.

But there was also a longer-term effect. Reagan-era legislative changes essentially ended New Deal restrictions on mortgage lending — restrictions that, in particular, limited the ability of families to buy homes without putting a significant amount of money down.

These restrictions were put in place in the 1930s by political leaders who had just experienced a terrible financial crisis, and were trying to prevent another. But by 1980 the memory of the Depression had faded. Government, declared Reagan, is the problem, not the solution; the magic of the marketplace must be set free. And so the precautionary rules were scrapped.

Together with looser lending standards for other kinds of consumer credit, this led to a radical change in American behavior.

We weren't always a nation of big debts and low savings: In the 1970s Americans saved almost 10 percent of

their income, slightly more than in the 1960s. It was only after the Reagan deregulation that thrift gradually disappeared from the American way of life, culminating in the near-zero savings rate that prevailed on the eve of the great crisis. Household debt was only 60 percent of income when Reagan took office, about the same as it was during the Kennedy administration. By 2007 it was up to 119 percent.

The turn that made our financial crisis inevitable took place in the early 1980s.

All this, we were assured, was a good thing: Sure, Americans were piling up debt, and they weren't putting aside any of their income, but their finances looked fine once you took into account the rising values of their

houses and their stock portfolios. Oops.

Now, the proximate causes of today's economic crisis lie in events that took place long after Reagan left office — in the global savings glut created by surpluses in China and elsewhere, and in the giant housing bubble that savings glut helped inflate.

But it was the explosion of debt over the previous quarter-century that made the U.S. economy so vulnerable. Overstretched borrowers were bound to start defaulting in large numbers once the housing bubble burst and unemployment began to rise.

These defaults in turn wreaked havoc with a financial system that — also mainly thanks to Reagan-era deregulation — took on too much risk with too little capital.

There's plenty of blame to go around these days. But the prime villains behind the mess we're in were Reagan and his circle of advisers — men who forgot the lessons of America's last great financial crisis, and condemned the rest of us to repeat it.

The unlucky one



**Paul
Krugman**

LONDON What would have happened if hanging chads and the Supreme Court hadn't denied Al Gore the White House in 2000? Many things would clearly have been different over the next eight years.

But one thing would probably have been the same: There would have been a huge housing bubble and a financial crisis when the bubble burst. And if Democrats had been in power when the bad news arrived, they would have taken the blame, even though things would surely have been as bad or worse under Republican rule.

You now understand the essentials of the current political situation in Britain.

For much of the past 30 years, politics and policy here and in America have moved in tandem. We had Reagan; they had Thatcher. We had the Garn-St. Germain Act of 1982, which dismantled New Deal-era banking regulation; they had the Big Bang of 1986, which deregulated London's financial industry. Both nations had an explosion of household debt and saw their financial systems become increasingly unsound.

In both countries, the conservatives who pushed through deregulation lost power in the 1990s. In each case, however, the new leaders were as infatuated with "innovative" finance as their predecessors were. Robert Rubin, in his years as the Treasury secretary, and Gordon Brown, in his years as the chancellor of the Exchequer, preached the same gospel.

But where America's conservative movement — better organized and far more ruthless than its British counterpart — managed to claw its way back to power at the beginning of this decade, in Britain, the Labor Party continued to rule right through the bubble years. Mr. Brown eventually became prime minister. And so the Bush bust in America is the Brown bust here. Do Mr. Brown and his party really deserve blame for the crisis here? Yes and no.

Mr. Brown bought fully into the dogma that the market knows best, that less regulation is more. In 2005 he called for "trust in the responsible company, the engaged employee and the educated consumer" and insisted that regu-

lation should have "not just a light touch but a limited touch."

There's no question that this zeal for deregulation set Britain up for a fall. Consider the counterexample of Canada — a country where Reagan/Thatcher-type financial deregulation never took hold. Sure enough, Canadian banks have been a pillar of stability in the crisis.

But here's the thing. While Mr. Brown and his party may deserve to be punished, their political opponents don't deserve to be rewarded.

After all, would a Conservative government have been any less in the thrall of free-market fundamentalism, any more willing to rein in runaway finance, over the past decade? Of course not.

And Mr. Brown's response to the crisis — a burst of activism to make up for his past passivity — makes sense, whereas that of his opponents does not.

The Brown government has moved aggressively to shore up troubled banks. This has potentially put taxpayers on the hook for large future bills, but the financial situation has stabilized. Mr. Brown has backed the Bank of England, which, like the Federal Reserve, has engaged in unconventional moves to free up credit. And he has shown himself willing to run large budget deficits now, even while scheduling tax increases for the future.

All of this seems to be working. Leading indicators have turned (slightly) positive, suggesting that Britain, whose competitiveness has benefited from the devaluation of the pound, will begin an economic recovery well before the rest of Europe.

Meanwhile, David Cameron, the Conservative leader, has had little to offer other than to raise the red flag of fiscal panic and demand that the British government tighten its belt immediately.

Now, many commentators have raised the alarm about Britain's fiscal outlook, and one rating agency has warned that the country may lose its AAA status (although the others disagree). But markets don't seem unduly worried: the interest rate on long-term British debt is only slightly higher than that on German debt, not what you'd expect from a country doomed to bankruptcy.

Still, if an election were held today, Mr. Brown and his party would lose badly. They were in power when the bad stuff happened, and the buck — or in this case, I guess, the quid — stops at No. 10 Downing Street.

It's a sobering prospect. If I were a member of the Obama administration's economic team — a team whose top members were as enthusiastic about the wonders of modern finance as their British counterparts — I'd be looking across the Atlantic and muttering, "There but for the disgrace of Bush v. Gore go I."

DPJ's Nakagawa wants one Asian currency

Shadow finance minister also wants a kinder, gentler economy

AFP-JIJ

The man who hopes to be Japan's next finance minister envisions an Asia united by a single currency, saying the dollar may no longer reign supreme in the future.

The opposition's shadow finance minister, Masaharu Nakagawa of the Democratic Party of Japan, also says he hopes to reshape the economy into a kinder, gentler place if the DPJ wins this year's general election.

"You can't invigorate society only through . . . the law of the jungle where the strong become stronger," he said. "The same player would always win if there were no handicaps in golf."

Prime Minister Taro Aso must call elections by September, when the DPJ hopes to throw the Liberal Democratic Party out of its almost uninterrupted half century in power.

Outlining some of the changes he would like to make if he becomes finance minister, Nakagawa said Asia should tackle security and economic issues as "a unified community."

"Asian currencies should be unified into a common currency in the course of the region's forming a single economic zone," he said.

He did not give a time frame, saying it would largely depend on economic and political developments in China.

Nakagawa said people must "take into account the possibility that the dollar might not function as the key currency any more in the medium and long term" as the world seeks a new order in the post-Cold War era.

Until an Asian common currency emerges, he said, "the Japanese government should make efforts to have the 'Asia zone' use the yen, not the dollar, for trade settlements. It's time for Japan to launch this plan."

Japan's government could extend lending to the International Monetary Fund on condition that it is in yen while guaranteeing bonds by Asian countries if they are denominated in the Japanese currency, he said.

Nakagawa, who turns 59 in June, studied foreign affairs at Georgetown University in the U.S. in the 1970s. A father of four, he represents a district in Mie Prefecture.

He describes himself as a "generalist" rather than an economic expert.

Speaking more broadly on his vision for Japan, he said the country followed the United States and its liberalism in

the past, but the time has come for the nation to be "more Asian."

"Now is the time for Japan to say what kind of world it would like to create, not to adapt itself to the given circumstances as it has done" since its defeat in World War II, he said.

At home, Nakagawa's vision is in line with the goal of a "compassionate society" advocated by his new party boss, Yukio Hatoyama.

The DPJ has proposed slashing corporate taxes for small companies so they have a better chance to compete.

The party has said it will spend ¥21 trillion over the next two years to revive the economy, including the tax cuts, payouts for families with kids and scrapping road tolls.

Censure motion eyed

KYODO

Democratic Party of Japan leader Yukio Hatoyama indicated Sunday his party may submit a censure motion or motion of no confidence against Prime Minister Taro Aso if he doesn't call a general election before August.

"We will discuss (the possibility of a censure motion) with the party leadership when it reaches a critical stage," Hatoyama said in Kumagaya, Saitama Prefecture.

DPJ lawmakers have floated a strategy of pressing Aso to dissolve the Lower House by adopting a censure motion against him in the opposition-controlled Upper House if he doesn't call the election soon after passing key bills.

Geithner's 'G-2' invitation

Kevin Rafferty
Hong Kong

SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

Some Chinese see U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, who was in Beijing this week, as a repentant debtor humbly visiting his bank manager. Influential Americans, however, see the visit as the start of a beautiful friendship, perhaps even a tipping point in global finance — the overture to the establishment of a Group of Two (G-2) economic giants, which will do a better job of directing the global economy than either the current Group of Seven (G-7) or the ambitiously unwieldy Group of 20.

There is a compelling logic in the idea of economic partnership between the United States, the biggest economic power on Earth, and China, now the third- or maybe second-biggest economy but destined to be No. 1 in 20 or 30 years time. The fact that China — in defiance of hitherto accepted norms of international economics of a developing country — is the biggest creditor to the heavily indebted U.S. adds a certain piquancy.

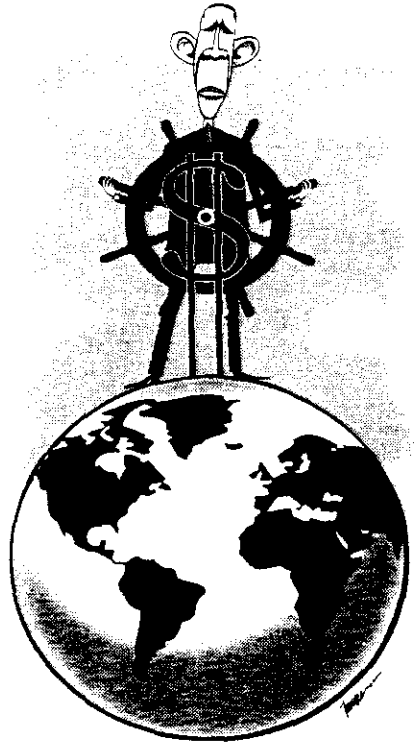
Coincidentally, Brad Setser of the Washington think tank Council on Foreign Relations calculates that China's foreign assets may be worth \$2.5 trillion, a cool \$500 billion more than usual estimates. Besides formal reserves of \$1.946 trillion, there is \$252 billion in portfolio debt held mainly by state banks, plus another \$186 billion "in a mysterious line item that corresponds with the banks' dollar reserve requirements and ... other foreign assets." Also, China Investment Corporation holds up to \$100 billion.

Within the portfolio, China has increased its holdings of U.S. treasuries, the safest and most liquid of U.S. securities, allowing China to switch easily to other assets when the moment is ripe. Indeed, China is pursuing a twin-track policy of buying treasuries for flexibility and commodities for security.

China seems to have woken up to the thought, variously attributed to John Maynard Keynes and John Paul Getty, that if you owe your bank \$100 or \$1,000, that's a problem for you, but if you owe your bank \$1 million, that's a problem for the bank.

An Xinhua article Sunday cited a poll of "23 famous Chinese economists" of whom 17 said the country's U.S. holdings "pose great risks to China's economy." But the critics did not advocate selling out.

Geithner's flacks have worked hard to present him as a Putonghua-speaking friend of China, not the man who asserted in writing during his Senate confirmation



THE STRAITS TIMES

hearings that President Barack Obama "believes that China is manipulating its currency." Unnamed officials claim that sentence was "a mistake," a phrase inserted by a junior-level official. It is not pleasant to see a key figure in the Obama administration wriggling away from responsibility this way. Was it political misjudgment on Geithner's part, or carelessness in not checking what was going out under his name?

The problem for Geithner and China is that the issues remain the same: (1) China can't sell its U.S. treasuries without taking huge losses leading to an appreciation of the yuan; and (2) with its massive \$1.85 trillion budget deficit this year, the U.S. must continue to offload treasuries on the world, and it wants to see continued appreciation of the Chinese currency to help it export more to China.

China continues to count the cost. Bond vigilantes have helped send U.S. government securities down by 4.3 percent this year, while Geithner's "strong dollar" fell by 4.9 percent in May.

Is this a case of nonidentical Siamese twins joined at the stomach, liver and kidneys, but not at the heart or head? Their mutual interests lead some prominent figures to argue that a G-2 will create a better world. Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser under President Jimmy

Carter, first suggested it.

But the idea of a G-2 gained traction when a prominent American and a Chinese joined forces. Robert Zoellick, president of the World Bank, and Justin Lin Yifu, his colleague and the bank's chief economist, argued in the Washington Post that: "For the world's economy to recover, these two economic powerhouses must cooperate and become the engine for the G-20. Without a strong G-2, the G-20 will disappoint."

They added that "economic interdependency is stark." In obvious ways the U.S. and China are mirror images of each other: The U.S. is China's biggest export market, and China buys most U.S. government debt. Unless both sides address the imbalances together, there is a risk of repeating the mistakes that created the crisis. But it would be dangerous to jump from the view of G-2 meetings as an important part of a solution to that of the G-2 as the savior of the world's economy. The G-2 may be necessary, but it is not a sufficient solution.

It is unthinkable to imagine solutions to the vast problems of the world — from economic recovery to creation of a greener, cleaner world — without involving Europe, Japan, India, Latin America, the major oil producers and sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, none of the above players has yet made a contribution to a global vision.

Japan is retreating into claims that its island culture is unique, when it should be looking at its own experience to suggest ways of pulling Asia together. After all, with its own large stock of U.S. treasuries and with a currency that is vulnerable to fluctuations in the dollar, Japan is not an idle spectator. Japan cannot afford to see itself apart from the Asian continent — unless it wishes to see China dominate. Tokyo should be looking also toward India, not to antagonize China, but to see how the democratic and entrepreneurial traditions of the two can blend and lend new dimensions to Asia's search for its 21st-century identity.

Besides economic and financial objections to a G-2, there is a political mine field to navigate. The Chinese magazine *Liaowang* has suggested that a G-2 "would do more harm than good," not least because, it said, America will never cede control of the world order and China, heeding Chairman Mao Zedong's dictum, will never seek to exert hegemony. Quite.

Kevin Rafferty is editor in chief of PlainWords Media (plainwordseditor@gmail.com).

Green with guilt: the movement to save Earth



GEORGE WILL

Washington

There once was an Indianapolis concert featuring 50 pianos. Splendid instruments, pianos. Still, 50 might have been excessive. As is today's chorus summoning us to save the planet.

In the history of developed democracies with literate publics served by mass media, there is no precedent for today's media enlistment in the crusade to promote global warming "awareness." Concerning this, journalism, which fancies itself skeptical and nonconforming, is neither.

The incessant hectoring by the media-political complex's "consciousness-raising" campaign has provoked a comic riposte in the form of "The Goode Family," an animated ABC entertainment program on Wednesdays (9 p.m. Eastern time). Cartoons seem, alas, to be the most effective means of seizing a mass audience's attention. Still, the program is welcome evidence of the bursting of what has been called "the green bubble."

Gerald and Helen Goode, their children and dog Che (when supervised, he is a vegan; when unsupervised, squirrels disappear) live in a college town, where T-shirts and other media instruct ("Meat is murder"), admonish ("Don't kill wood") and exhort ("Support our troops... and their opponents").

The college, where Gerald works, gives students tenure. And when Gerald says his department needs money to raise the percentage of minority employees, his boss cheerily replies, "Or we could just fire three white guys. Everybody wins!" Helen shops at the One Earth store, where community shaming enforces social responsibility: "Attention One Earth

shoppers, the driver of the SUV is in aisle four. He's wearing the baseball cap."

The New York Times television critic disapproves. The show "feels aggressively off-kilter with the current mood, as if it had been incubated in the early to mid-'90s, when it was possible to find global-warming skeptics among even the reasonable and informed." That is a perfect (because completely complacent) sample of the grating smugness of the planet-savers, delivered by an entertainment writer: Reasonable dissent is *impossible*. Cue the pianos.

"The Goode Family" does not threaten Jonathan Swift's standing as the premier English-language satirist. But when a Goode child apologizes to his parent for driving too much, and the parent

Green consumption has become a 'positional consumption' that identified the consumer as a member of a moral and intellectual elite. A 2007 survey found that 57 percent of Prius purchasers said they bought their car because 'it makes a statement about me.'

responds, "It's OK... what's important is that you feel guilty about it," the program touches upon an important phenomenon: ecology as psychology.

In "The Green Bubble: Why Environmentalism Keeps Imploding" (The New Republic, May 20), Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, authors of "Break Through: Why We Can't Leave Saving the Planet to Environmentalists," say that a few years ago, being green "moved beyond politics." Gestures — bringing reusable grocery bags to the store, purchasing a \$4 heirloom tomato, inflating tires, weatherizing windows — "gained fresh urgency" and "were suddenly infused with grand significance."

Green consumption became "positional consumption" that identified

the consumer as a member of a moral and intellectual elite. A 2007 survey found that 57 percent of Prius purchasers said they bought their car because "it makes a statement about me." Honda, alert to the bull market in status effects, reshaped its 2009 Insight hybrid to look like a Prius.

Nordhaus and Shellenberger note the telling "insignificance," as environmental measures, of planting gardens or using fluorescent bulbs. Their significance is therapeutic, but not for the planet. They make people feel better:

"After all, we can't escape the fact that we depend on an infrastructure — roads, buildings, sewage systems, power plants, electrical grids, etc. — that requires huge quantities of fossil fuels. But the ecological irrelevance of these practices was beside the point."

The point of "utopian environmentalism" was to reduce guilt. During the green bubble, many Americans became "captivated by the twin thoughts that human civilization could soon come crashing down — and that we are on the cusp of a sudden leap forward in consciousness, one that will allow us to heal ourselves, our society, and our planet. Apocalyptic fears meld seamlessly into utopian hopes." Suddenly, commonplace acts — e.g., buying light bulbs — infused pedestrian lives with cosmic importance. But:

"Greens often note that the changing global climate will have the greatest impact on the world's poor; they neglect to mention that the poor also have the most to gain from development fueled by cheap fossil fuels like coal. For the poor, the climate is already dangerous."

Now, say Nordhaus and Shellenberger, "the green bubble" has burst, pricked by Americans' intensified reluctance to pursue greenness at a cost to economic growth. The dark side of utopianism is "escapism and a disengagement from reality that marks all bubbles, green or financial." Re-engagement with reality is among the recession's benefits.

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Keeping the faith in globalization

Raghuram Rajan
Chicago

As governments do more to try to coax the world economy out of recession, the danger of protectionism is becoming more real. It is emerging in ways that were unforeseen by those who founded our existing global institutions.

Unfortunately, the discussion between countries on trade nowadays is very much a dialogue of the deaf, with countries spouting platitudes without agreeing on enforceable and verifiable commitments. There is an urgent need to reform global institutions — and more dramatically than envisaged by the Group of 20 thus far.

Protectionism is not just about raising tariffs on imports; it is any government action that distorts the global production and allocation of goods, services and capital to favor domestic producers, thereby reducing overall efficiency.

For example, government pressure on multinational banks to lend domestically, or to withdraw liquidity from foreign branches, is protectionism, as are capital injections into multinational companies with the explicit requirement that domestic jobs be preserved. Such actions are problematic not only because they insulate inefficient forms of production, but also because foreign countries respond by adopting similar measures toward their national champions, so that everyone is worse off.

The number of inefficient workers protected by these measures is offset by the number of efficient workers laid off by foreign multinationals responding to political pressures in their home country. Perhaps of greatest concern, moreover, is that the public, especially in poor countries that cannot undertake offsetting measures, will come to distrust global integration, with multinationals viewed as Trojan horses.

In addition to explicit protectionist measures, governments now plan actions that will affect others across the globe. For example, the large volume of public debt that industrial countries will issue will undoubtedly raise interest rates and

affect developing country governments' borrowing costs. There is little dialogue about how industrial-country issuances can be staggered to minimize the impact on global markets, and what alternatives can be developed for countries that are shut out. If developing countries are left to their own devices, they will conclude that they should self-insure by rebuilding foreign-exchange reserves to even higher levels, a strategy that has clearly hurt global growth.

We need a moderate-size representative group of leaders of the world's largest economies to meet regularly to discuss such issues, informed by an impartial secretariat that will place its analyses before the group. Initially, the group should only exert peer pressure on its members to comply with international responsibilities. But, as confidence in the group's decision-making — and in the impartiality of the secretariat — improves, members might give it some teeth, such as the ability to impose collective economic sanctions on recalcitrant members.

The United Nations is too large to serve this purpose, and the most obvious candidate for the group, the G-20, is not representative. There is, however, a representative alternative — the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC), a group of finance ministers and central bank governors that meets twice a year to advise the International Monetary Fund.

While the IMFC could be shrunk (for example, if euro-zone countries agree to a common seat), the real challenge is to make it a venue in which countries talk to one another rather than at one another. For this, some changes would be in order: • First, the frequency of meetings should be increased, especially in times of crisis, and the level of a few of these meetings enhanced. For example, two meetings a year at the head-of-government level and quarterly meetings at the finance-minister level (with more at the deputy-minister level) would provide ample time for dialogue, and thus for trust-building, and would allow the

commitments made by the heads of government to be monitored.

• Second, the IMF's permanent Executive Board, established in an era when travel was costly and communications difficult, and consisting of midlevel government functionaries, should be abolished. Important decisions should be vetted by the IMFC and others delegated to IMF management. Current executive directors typically do not have the authority to make commitments on their countries' behalf, so their effort is often diverted to minutiae. And, in an attempt to preserve its turf, the Board constantly attempts to keep the IMFC from discussing anything of substance. • Third, the obvious secretariat is the IMF. Unfortunately, the fund is not regarded as being impartial, especially by countries that have been seared by its past conditionality.

The IMF has, however, become far more neutral than it is given credit for — though it could take more steps to distance itself from its past. These include abolishing any region or country's right to appoint IMF management; allowing the fund to borrow from markets so that it does not have to keep seeking key countries' permission to expand; eliminating any country's official veto power over major decisions; and having its agenda set by the IMFC rather than outside bodies.

Industrial countries should be happy that developing countries would take greater responsibility for global economic outcomes, rather than simply sulking about their lack of voice and representation.

Developing countries, in turn, would gain greater voice, but would also be forced to contribute ideas (and resources) to deal with global problems. And maybe, just maybe, we would preserve faith in globalization.

*Raghuram Rajan is a professor at the University of Chicago School of Business and a former chief economist of the IMF.
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Feasible anti-emission goal



TAKAMITSU
SAWA

In July 2008 the Japanese government adopted a target for 2050 of reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by 60 to 80 percent from 2005 levels. At the same time, a special panel was created to deliberate midterm reduction goals (through 2020).

Views among panel members, however, have been so diversified that as of April, there were six separate proposals on how 2020 emission levels should compare against 1990 levels: (1) 4 percent increase, (2) 1 percent increase to 5 percent reduction, (3) 7 percent reduction, (4) 8 to 17 percent reduction, (5) 15 percent reduction, and (6) 25 percent reduction.

Virtually no objection has been expressed against a long-term target of halving global emissions by 2050. That's because few, if any, of those now debating the issue will be alive 40 years from now.

By 2050, today's newborns will be 40 years old, and those in their final year of university will be 62. Japan's political and economic landscape in 2050 will be dominated by those who today are under 22. So, the most effective and least costly means of reducing harmful emissions is to elevate the consciousness of the younger generations.

Achieving the 2050 reduction goal requires "backcasting" of specific steps. That means if total global emissions are to be halved by then, the industrialized nations, including Japan, will have to reduce their emission levels by about 70 percent. If it is assumed that technologically feasible reduction rates will decrease from decade to decade, the emission level by 2020 will have to be 25 percent lower than in 1990. If, on the other hand, feasible reduction rates rise, then the 2020 emission level can be 15 percent lower. I believe the latter assumption is more realistic, which leads me to favor the 15 percent reduction proposal above.

In December last year, the 27 member nations of the European Union adopted a declaration to reduce their combined greenhouse-gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020 from 1990 levels. This was

followed up with a new and more ambitious proposal in January, calling for a 30-percent reduction by all of the industrialized countries.

President Barack Obama has so far been less aggressive, saying only that 2020 emissions within the United States will be reduced to 1990 levels. It should be noted, however, that his goal is more ambitious than the first three of the six proposals being debated in Japan — if it is taken into account that total emissions in the U.S., which broke away from the Kyoto Protocol to 2007, was 14.7 percent above 1990 levels.

Another factor that must not be overlooked is changes in population in Japan and the U.S. In recent years, the U.S. population has been exploding, and is expected to rise from 255.5 million in 1990 to 338.4 million in 2020. By contrast, Japan's population is forecast to change little, rising from 123.6 million in 1990 to 124.1 million in 2020, according to statistics released by the Internal Affairs Ministry.

In the U.S. where the population is projected to rise by 33.4 percent, the goal is to reduce per capita emissions by 25 percent. By contrast, in Japan, with little change in population, some are favoring an emission increase of 4 percent.

With all other industrialized nations determined to make sacrifices in order to mitigate the climate change, the "reasonableness" favored by the Japan Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren) as the basis for demanding less stringent reduction goals appears incompatible with what is regarded as "reasonable" by other countries. As Environment Minister Tetsuo Saito has said, Japan will be "laughed at" in December by participants at the "COP 15" U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen if it proposes to let its emissions rise by 4 percent.

Even though there does not appear to be much hope for a major technological breakthrough in reducing greenhouse gases over the next 10 years, there are reasons to believe that reducing emissions by 15 percent from 1990 levels, or by 21.2 percent from 2006 levels, is possible.

First, if Japan's population remains virtually unchanged, all that is required is to cut back on per capita emissions by 15 percent from the 1990 levels.

Second, if, as the EU member nations claim, the newly emerging economies agree to be responsible for a certain portion of emission reductions,

investments in clean development mechanisms in those countries will take the form of joint implementation between developed and developing nations. That will enable the advanced countries to get credit under emissions trading arrangements. This would cover a large portion of the 15 percent reduction required of the industrialized countries.

Third, the next decade will see a growing number of people using solar and wind power generation, stationary fuel cells and electric cars, which in turn will become the driving force in developing the economy and creating employment opportunities. Furthermore, with advanced methods of producing bio-ethanol from cellulose, a sharp reduction in carbon dioxide can be expected in the transportation sector.

Fourth, there is still much room for energy conservation in buildings.

Fifth, between 2010 and 2020, the Japanese economy will grow not much more than 1.5 percent annually, with service and information industries playing a bigger role than in the past. This will make economic growth less dependent on energy consumption.

Sixth, the general public has become far more conscious of environmental problems than ever, and is willing to use less energy, conserve resources and reduce waste. Younger generations, in particular, are steadily changing their lifestyles, exemplified by less enthusiasm for owning automobiles.

I am convinced that it is possible to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by 15 percent by 2020 from prevailing 1990 levels. Now that home electric appliances and passenger cars have saturated their respective markets, popularizing eco-friendly products is the only way to ensure economic growth.

Ambitious goals for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions will not be an impediment to economic growth. On the contrary, the more stringent the medium-term targets for emission reductions are, the quicker will be the pace of popularizing eco-friendly products, which in turn will serve to shore up the economy by creating new jobs.

Takamitsu Sawa is a professor at Ritsumeikan University's Graduate School of Policy Science and an appointed professor at Kyoto University's Institute of Economic Research.

Korea calls for close ties with Asean

By: AGENCIES

Published: 1/06/2009 at 04:52 AM

Seogwipo - South Korea imposed heavy security on Sunday for a summit with Asean leaders following North Korean nuclear and missile tests that frayed nerves across the region. South Korean President Lee Myung-bak called on Sunday for closer business and cultural ties with Southeast Asia to create a common economic community that is a leader in green growth. Lee, who invited leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian nations to commemorate 20 years of relations between the Seoul and the bloc, hailed the expansion of their economic ties.

Total trade has grown 11 times over the past two decades to \$90.2 billion last year, he said, and is expected to increase to \$150 billion by 2015. "We must strengthen our economic partnership, expand cultural exchange and become partners in our common goal of taking the lead in the new era of green growth," Lee told business executives ahead of a summit on Monday and Tuesday. "We have the vast potential for future growth." The two sides have concluded free trade agreements in goods and services and plan to sign an investment accord at the summit.

The summit was planned months ago, but North Korea's underground nuclear test and a series of short-range missile launches last week threatens to steal the limelight from economic and diplomatic matters. The summit venue of Seogwipo - on the island of Jeju off the southern coast - is the city farthest away from the North. Still, the nervous South Korean government is taking no chances, positioning a surface-to-air missile outside the venue aimed toward the north, amid signs Pyongyang was preparing to stage a new long-range missile exercise.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva was among the leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) attending the two-day summit, which begins Monday and commemorates 20 years of relations between South Korea and the bloc. Some 5,000 police officers, including approximately 200 commandos, and special vehicles that can analyse sarin gas and other chemicals have been deployed near the venue of the Seogwipo summit.

Marines, special forces and air patrols also kept watch on the island. South Korean officials said Saturday that spy satellites had spotted signs that the North may be preparing to transport a long-range missile to a launch site. The North has attacked South Korean targets before, bombing a Korea Air jet in 1987 and trying to kill then-President Chun Doo-hwan in Burma in 1983.

On Saturday in Singapore, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates warned at an annual meeting of defense and security officials that the United States would not accept a nuclear-armed North Korea, while China called for calm.

Gates said North Korea's defiant acts could spark an arms race with serious consequences for Asia. "Our goal is complete and verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, and we will not accept North Korea as a nuclear state," Gates said.

China, US crucial to world economy: Geithner

By: AFP

Published: 1/06/2009 at 12:57 PM

US Treasury chief Timothy Geithner began a two-day visit to Beijing by calling China and the United States indispensable partners in solving the economic crisis and other world issues. Geithner, who earlier this year described China as a currency manipulator, also used a speech at Peking University to urge his hosts to allow a more flexible exchange rate. "China and the United States individually, and together, are so important in the global economy and financial system that what we do has a direct impact on the stability and strength of the international economic system," he said.

"Global problems will not be solved without US-China cooperation. That goes for the entire range of issues that face our world, from economic recovery and financial repair to climate change and energy policy." Geithner later held talks with China's Vice Premier for economic affairs, Wang Qishan, and will meet President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao on Tuesday. While praising Beijing's strategy to stimulate domestic demand and overcome the global financial crisis, he urged China to deepen the reform of its currency regime. "An important part of this strategy is the government's commitment to continue progress toward a more flexible exchange rate regime," Geithner said, according to a text of his speech.

"Greater exchange rate flexibility will help reinforce the shift in the composition of growth, encourage resource shifts to support domestic demand, and provide greater ability for monetary policy to achieve sustained growth with low inflation in the future." Geithner triggered anger in Beijing in January when he said in a written reply to a senator during a confirmation hearing that US President Barack Obama "believes that China is manipulating its currency." In April, Obama's administration said China had not manipulated its currency to snare a competitive advantage, but insisted that the yuan remained undervalued.

While answering questions following his speech, Geithner said Beijing's massive US bond holdings were "very safe," while reiterating the US desire to maintain a strong dollar. Such issues are expected to be the focus of his talks with Chinese leaders, who have expressed concerns over the safety of China's nearly 800 billion dollars in US bonds amid a rising US budget deficit. "As we recover from this unprecedented crisis, we will cut our fiscal deficit (and) we will eliminate the extraordinary governmental support that we have put in place to overcome the crisis," Geithner said in the speech.

Thanks to its export-oriented economy, China has built up the world's largest forex reserves -- amounting to nearly two trillion dollars -- with much of it coming from huge surpluses with the United States. The enormous reserves have also made Beijing the biggest holder of US treasury bonds that are crucial to Washington's efforts to kick-start its economy. In his speech, Geithner also urged Beijing to open its markets to US imports and investment. "I will be a strong advocate for US interests, just as I expect my counterparts to represent China's," he said at the university where he studied Chinese in the early 1980s.

"China has benefited hugely from open trade and investment, and the ability to greatly increase its exports to the rest of the world. In turn, we expect increased opportunities to export to and invest in the Chinese economy." He also said the United States was prepared to support a larger role for China in the international system. "The United States will fully support having China play a role in the principal cooperative arrangements that help shape the international system, a role that is commensurate with China's importance in the global economy," he said. "China is already too important to the global economy not to have a full seat at the international table."

US, China to start new talks in July

By: AFP

Published: 2/06/2009 at 05:57 PM

The United States and China will hold the first round of their new strategic and economic dialogue in Washington at the end of July, the US State Department announced on Tuesday. During the annual meetings, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will hold strategic talks with her Chinese counterpart State Councillor Dai Bingguo, who is in charge of China's diplomacy, it said in a statement.

On the economic track, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner will hold discussions with China's Vice Premier Wang Qishan, who holds the nation's economic portfolio. The dialogue was agreed to by US President Barack Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao earlier this year, but the timing of the first round had not previously been confirmed.

The new format for the talks replaces a twice-yearly dialogue focused purely on economic affairs that China and the United States held during the administration of former US president George W. Bush.

The announcement followed separate talks Geithner had in Beijing on Tuesday with Hu and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. "The dialogue will focus on addressing the challenges and opportunities that both countries face on a wide range of bilateral, regional and global areas of immediate and long-term strategic interest," the statement said.

"Through the two days of meetings, we look forward to in-depth discussions with our Chinese counterparts to enhance the welfare of the citizens of both countries."

Asean, South Korea to push for 'green growth'

By: AFP

Published: 2/06/2009 at 10:57 AM

South Korean and Southeast Asian leaders agreed to work together to combat global warming and promote "green growth" in the fast developing region. The pledge of environmentally friendly and sustainable growth came at the end of South Korea's two-day summit with the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) on the southern resort island of Jeju.

The 11 leaders said in a joint statement they agreed to cooperate in improving energy efficiency and diversifying energy sources into nuclear power, hydropower, solar energy and bio-energy. They promised to work closely to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and cut greenhouse gas emissions blamed for climate change.

"We attached great importance to regional energy cooperation in light of the volatile energy prices, climate change and the need for environmental protection," a joint statement said. The Asean leaders noted South Korea's "low carbon, green growth" initiative for sustainable development, one of the main policies which President Lee Myung-Bak wanted to promote during the summit.

Lee escorted Asean leaders on a tour of a "Green Growth" exhibition showcasing South Korea's environmental policy and technologies. He told the summit that climate change was "the most daunting task of humans that we can no longer delay tackling, and it is a challenge that cannot be overcome by only a few individual countries." The South Korean president said Seoul would offer 200 million dollars for East Asia Climate Partnership activities aimed at sustainable growth in the region.

EDITORIAL Shock move by White House

Published: 16/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: News

The latest decision on Southeast Asia by US President Barack Obama is the second disturbing action by Washington affecting this region. Late last Friday, after the main news cycles for the week had elapsed, Mr Obama announced a major new policy initiative. The low-level statement that he was declaring Laos and Cambodia eligible for major US loans and trade concessions took the rest of the region by surprise.

The first visit to Southeast Asia by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton largely ignored the longest and strongest US allies. Now, the decision to give special treatment to Laos and Cambodia came as a bit of shock, including in Thailand.

Mr Obama's "determination" about each country was a brief official statement, posted at the White House media room and website. Such presidential determinations are legal obligations in many cases in the United States; these were the 20th and 21st of an early presidency. But as these statements showed, they are often "game changers" by the president. In these almost identical statements, Mr Obama declared that Laos and Cambodia are eligible to be beneficiaries of US Export-Import Bank loans for American businesses in those countries.

The reason, Mr Obama said, is that each "has ceased to be a Marxist-Leninist country". Mr Obama was apparently not concerned with the nuances of Marxist evolution. It was mandatory to declare Laos and Cambodia were not communist countries in order to achieve his true goal - to provide millions, and perhaps billions, of investment capital for American businesses to set up, operate in and trade with the two neighbouring countries.

Mr Obama did not explain why he set this goal. Indeed, the manner of the announcement was to keep all questions and justification to a minimum. This apparently was to stifle the negative reaction of political groups in the US who are appalled at the treatment of Hmong tribespeople by Laos. A more important result, however, is that Mr Obama has created negative fallout in Thailand and the region.

The US Exim Bank rarely is involved with Thailand, and generally supports one-time sales rather than investment. In 2003, it provided support for sales of Boeing 747 aircraft to Thai Airways International, and there are occasional cases where the bank has backed smaller deals. As the Thai economy has developed, the US Exim Bank has been an ever-smaller presence.

That is why Mr Obama's unexpected support for Laos and Cambodia disappointed many in Thailand. For years, Thai businesses have expanded into these countries. The overseas business expansion - ironically with the frequent support of the Exim Bank of Thailand - has been a major engine of Thai growth. This in turn has led to decreasing dependence upon foreign help and special programmes by Washington.

The sudden entry of the US Exim Bank into these Thai markets will affect Thai trade and the economy. By failing to warn and prepare Thai authorities and businesses, the Obama administration has created a shock that will have negative implications, at least at the start.

This problem could easily have been avoided had the White House warned of the coming decision and allowed time for diplomatic talks and business preparations. Failing to do so again begs the question of whether the United States is seriously engaged with its long-time allies in this region.

The Jakarta Post

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RI to get \$1b ADB loan to help back the budget

Aditya Suharmoko , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Fri, 06/05/2009 10:20 AM | Business

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a US\$1 billion loan for Indonesia that will help the country sustain its budget and cope with the global financial crisis.

ADB stated Thursday that the loan was part of a joint standby loan facility provided by the Australian government, the Japanese government and the World Bank, totaling up to \$5.5 billion.

ADB provides \$1 billion, Australia \$1 billion, Japan \$1.5 billion and the World Bank \$2 billion.

"The global financial crisis has made it expensive for Indonesia to access international debt markets and trade finance, which could constrain spending on essential social services and poverty alleviation programs," said Jaseem Ahmed, the director of ADB's financial sector, public management and trade division for Southeast Asia.

With the ADB's approval, now only Australia that has yet to give final approval to a standby loan.

Indonesia is the first country among ADB's members to receive this type of standby loan, ADB said.

The single-tranche loan will have a 15-year term, including a 3-year grace period, with an interest rate set in accordance with ADB's London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR)-based lending facility.

ADB said that Indonesia needs to support critical public expenditure for poverty alleviation, social protection and infrastructure maintenance amid the global financial crisis.

"This loan will enable the government to maintain public expenditure, and to respond more effectively to the poverty impacts of the financial crisis," Ahmed said.

This is one of the largest single loans ADB has ever provided to Indonesia, and is expected to help plug this year's budget deficit reaching Rp 139.5 trillion (\$13.8 billion), equivalent to 2.5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP).

The government had said it will access the standby loans only if market conditions remain tight and the draw down criteria "triggers" set out in the financing plan are met.

"We will use the standby loans, if not in 2009, [then] in 2010," said the Finance Ministry's head of fiscal policy Anggito Abimanyu, adding that next year Indonesia may still face problems, while recovery starts.

The ministry says the government expects to secure Rp 142.3 trillion in total financing this year, with Rp 44.5 trillion backup available from the standby loans.

The government plans to sell Rp 99.6 trillion of bonds this year and has already sold Rp 89 trillion so far, according to the Finance Ministry's debt management office.

Anggito said that Indonesia will issue its first yen-denominated bonds later this year, with Japan, bearing in mind market conditions.

Australia is expected to provide its loan this month, he added.

Indonesia's economy grew by 4.4 percent in the first quarter of 2009 from a year earlier, according to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS). The government expects a full-year growth of between 4 percent and 4.5 percent.

Next year, the government forecasts the economy will expand at between 5 and 6 percent, as the economy starts to recover from the global economic downturn.

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Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/06/05/ri-get-1b-adb-loan-help-back-budget.html>

The Jakarta Post

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IMF ups estimate as RI proves resilient

The Jakarta Post , Jakarta , | Sat, 06/06/2009 12:28 PM | Business

The resilience of Indonesia's economy, which posted the third-fastest growth rate in Asia in the first quarter of 2009, has led the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to revise upward its 2009 growth projection for the country, which is Southeast Asia's largest economy.

The IMF said on Friday it has revised the full-year growth estimate from 2.5 to between 3 and 4 percent, although this is still lower than the government's estimate of 4 to 4.5 percent.

The IMF's senior resident representative for Indonesia Milan Zavadjil told reporters Friday that Indonesia entered the global financial crisis in a strong position and was thereby able to withstand the shocks, especially during the last quarter of 2008.

"There are signs of returning market confidence as indicated by the stronger rupiah, lower interest rates and recovery of the stock market," Zavadjil said at the conclusion of the IMF annual review of Indonesia's economy.

An IMF mission headed by division chief of the Asia Pacific Department Thomas Rumbaugh recently concluded a two-week assessment of the country's economic outlook. The team met with all economic ministers and the central bank's board of governors as part of its evaluation.

"Supported by election-related spending, the economy's resilience is also evident in the stronger-than-expected growth in the first quarter *4.4 percent*, making it one of the fastest growing economies within the G20," Zavadjil added.

Therefore, he said, the IMF had raised its projection of economic growth to 3-4 percent for 2009, with inflation expected to fall to 5 percent by the end of the year.

However, Rumbaugh warned against complacency, pointing out there is still a great deal of uncertainty as the signs of the global economic recovery may not hold for the rest of the year.

Rumbaugh said despite the encouraging economic performance, careful economic management should continue due to the potential wave of further adverse swings in the global market.

"The government needs to accelerate the implementation of its fiscal-stimulus measures for the rest of the year to maintain the momentum of economic-growth."

Rumbaugh welcomed the steady decline in the central bank's benchmark interest rate, which currently stands at 7 percent, as it is expected lead to higher credit expansion and help support recovery in domestic investment.

Zavadjil added the monetary-easing cycle may soon run its course and policy adjustments may be needed if global risk aversion or external liquidity risks put pressure on the balance of payments position.

However, Rumbaugh said during the meetings with economics ministers over the past two weeks the government never hinted at the possibility of taking a new loan, even though the IMF had introduced a new flexible credit line facility, which is available without strings attached.

"No, the government didn't mention anything about it, as Indonesia really doesn't have any balance of payments

problems and its foreign reserve is in a comfortable position," Rumbaugh added.

The IMF introduced a contingent line of credit facility early this year for countries facing speculative attacks on their currencies. Borrowers which take this facility are expected not to draw on it unless it is essential they do so, although it has the potential to generate market confidence in the borrower's ability to ride out the storm.

Rumbaugh said the soundness of Indonesia's financial sector had been strengthened with profitable and well-capitalized banks and improved supervision.

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Presidential hopefuls and globalization strategies

Aleksius Jemadu , Jakarta | Tue, 06/09/2009 10:47 AM | Opinion

When there is a sharp contestation of arguments among political leaders it is the public who benefit, because at the end of the day well thought-out policies can be produced.

Presidential hopefuls - Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), Jusuf Kalla (JK) and Megawati Soekarnoputri - realize that the main issue in the upcoming presidential election will be the economy. No wonder there has been a hot debate regarding their economic policies.

From the perspective of national interest, an economic debate like this is not only timely but crucial. Rarely, if ever, do our political leaders discuss in depth Indonesia's globalization strategies.

Successes of other countries such as China and India show us that the predatory nature of globalization can only be dealt with if we have well-designed strategies and a clear agenda of goals to achieve. For instance, China took three decades from the time of Deng Xiao Ping's modernization program in late 1970s before it could reach its current economic superpower status.

India, meanwhile, began to open its economy in the early 1990's and has now managed to become one of the global players in the lucrative information technology sector.

With the selection of the former central bank governor Boediono as SBY's running mate, there has been a hot discussion in the media of whether Indonesia should go the "neoliberal" way in dealing with globalization challenges.

Those who agree with Boediono argue there is nothing wrong if Indonesia emulates the best practices of China and India. The opponents of that approach assert that a "neoliberal" economy will only lead to systematic pauperization of the Indonesian people.

As far as SBY and Boediono are concerned, the standpoint is clear. Today, Indonesia's economy is already on the right track and the only problem now is how to utilize all our regional and global commitments to sustain high economic growth and increase people's prosperity.

It is interesting to note that soon after Boediono was declared as SBY's running mate, JK made widely publicized visits to traditional markets, where small traders were struggling to survive under the pressure of the current global financial crisis. JK seemed to want to convince the public he is ready to offer alternative strategies to neoliberalism.

Megawati Soekarnoputri and Prabowo Subianto played their own parts in the game by choosing up "Pro-People" as their main campaign theme. It remains to be seen how their version of a "people-oriented economy" will challenge the domination of the neoliberal discourse.

There is a prediction that the closer we get to the presidential election, the more SBY and Boediono will be attacked by their contenders. Increasing numbers of people without jobs, increasing prices of basic needs and costs of education and health services can easily be politicized to delegitimize SBY's economic leadership.

However, there are a number of internal and external factors that may swing the pendulum in favor of SBY and Boediono.

First, if the legislative election can be seen as a referendum to test whether the Indonesian people agree with

government's economic policies, the victory of SBY's Democratic Party should be regarded as a sign of popular consent to his model of economic development.

Second, without belittling JK's sincerity in promoting a more nationalistic economic development, such enthusiasm boomerang back on him unless he proves this commitment with his own track record.

Third, when Prabowo, Megawati's running mate, announced his incredibly huge wealth, many people found a disturbing paradox in his personality.

How can a man who has been so materially enriched through the globalization of capital and commodity markets suddenly have populist proclivities to promote a "people-oriented economy"?

Fourth, the proponents of neoliberalism are quick to point out that the success of leading economies in Asia like Japan, and Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) China and India, has been due to their extensive exposure to globalization.

Notwithstanding the upper hand of the neoliberal discourse in the contestation of development paradigms, SBY and Boediono need to pay attention to the following economic wisdom. Moses Abramowitz, a pioneer in the study of economic growth in the early 1950s, said the fundamental requirement for economic development was social capacity.

Therefore, it is more complicated than just a factor of accumulation. Growth requires the state to develop economic institutions, endorse social behaviors and produce policies favorable to economic development.

Whichever economic ideology we embrace, in the final analysis economic development is about the quality of human agency.

Let us hope that all the presidential hopefuls will take this as the ultimate goal of their economic strategies. That way, they all deserve the support of their respective constituents.

The writer is a professor of international politics and lives in Jakarta.

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Improved economic conditions will weaken fundamentalism: Prabowo

Dicky Christanto and Blontank Poer , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta, Surakarta | Tue, 06/09/2009 10:46 AM | Presidential Election

Continuous and extensive economic growth, which increases the welfare of Indonesian people, will weaken Islamic fundamentalism vice presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto said Monday.

"Fundamentalist activities have increased because the government has failed to provide welfare to Indonesians," he told representatives of a Chinese-Indonesian Protestant church community in a closed meeting.

"It is latent poverty that makes people stop believing in the country's Pancasila ideology."

Recently, organizations such as Hizbut Tahrir, the Indonesian Mujahidin Council and several fundamentalist groups, have publicly announced the need to replace Pancasila with Islamic sharia law.

These organizations consider Pancasila and the government to have failed in delivering prosperity to Indonesians, who are predominantly Muslim.

Prabowo said it was clear the next administration would be tasked to seek ways to immediately improve the nation's economic conditions to curb the rise of religious fundamentalism.

"Such breakthroughs will arise by reviewing all policies that may contain and result in potential injustices," he said.

"Of course it will take a lot of courage to review policies and deal with these kinds of religious fundamentalists."

Attended by dozens of church leaders and members, the two-hour closed door meeting was dominated by questions posed to vice presidential candidates about their perspectives on Indonesian pluralism.

Meanwhile in Surakarta, Central Java, incumbent President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono attended a conference of village heads, Parade Nusantara, and used the opportunity to convey the political agenda of his presidential campaign.

"Are you ready to continue our duties for the glory of our nation and country and for the welfare of the people?" Susilo asked the village heads.

"Lanjutkan," the village heads answered in unison.

Lanjutkan (continue) is Yudhoyono's campaign motto for his second term in office as President.

Earlier, Parade Nusantara chairman, Sudir Santoso spoke highly of Yudhoyono's achievements.

"It was Pak SBY who started the People's Microcredit (KUR) and the Community Empowerment National Program Mandiri (PNPM)," he said.

"There has also been a significant increase in our budget, now each village receives hundreds of millions of rupiah, from a mere Rp 5 million *US\$798* that we previously received."

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Singapore economy seen shrinking 6.5 pct in 2009

The Associated Press , Singapore | Wed, 06/10/2009 3:03 PM | World

Singapore analysts cut forecasts for 2009 economic growth - and now expect a deeper recession - as the global slowdown hurts demand for the city-state's exports.

The country's gross domestic product will likely shrink 6.5 percent this year, according to the median forecast of 19 economists in a quarterly survey that the central bank released Wednesday.

In the previous survey in March, analysts had expected the economy to contract 4.9 percent this year.

But they boosted their forecast for 2010 growth to a 4.2 percent expansion from 3.3 percent.

Analysts foresee manufacturing leading this year's decline by falling 14 percent, while financial services drop 4.1 percent and wholesale and retail trade slide 11 percent.

Construction, buoyed by a \$13 billion government stimulus package announced in January, is the only sector analysts expect to grow this year, up 16 percent.

Analysts said the economy will likely shrink 7.7 percent in the second quarter from a year earlier, more than their 6.9 percent forecast in March, said the central bank, known as the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

The analysts expect the economy to contract 6.6 percent in the third quarter and 1.2 percent in the fourth quarter.

Non-oil exports, which account for about 60 percent of the Singapore's GDP, plummeted 26 percent in the first quarter as demand from the U.S, Europe and Japan dried up. Analysts expect non-oil exports to fall 14.5 percent this year.

The economy fell a seasonally adjusted, annualized 14.6 percent in the first quarter from the previous quarter and slid 10.1 percent from a year earlier. The government expects the economy to contract between 6 percent and 9 percent this year.

Prices will likely fall 0.5 percent this year compared to a forecast of an increase of 0.2 percent in March, the survey showed. The inflation rate was 6.5 percent last year.

The unemployment rate will probably jump to 4.2 percent this year from 2.6 percent, according to the analyst survey.

The Jakarta Post

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Negotiators embrace fresh momentum for Doha round

Niken Prathivi , The Jakarta Post , Nusa Dua | Wed, 06/10/2009 1:00 PM | Headlines

Negotiations to secure the global trade deal under the World Trade Organization (WTO) have gained fresh momentum with the conclusion of the 33rd Cairns Group meeting in Nusa Dua, Bali, on Tuesday.

The meeting of global exporters showed signs of willingness from participants and special guests such as the United States and WTO chairman Pascal Lamy to reinvigorate the negotiations that started in Qatari capital Doha in 2001 and bring it to conclusion in the shortest possible time.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Lamy said the United States and India had given clear signals "they wanted to get things up" before WTO members meet in Geneva this year to formulate a roadmap that will help lead to the conclusion of the round.

"We should complete it by 2010," he said while adding the so-called Doha round had completed 80 percent of the process.

Indonesian Trade Minister Mari Elka Pangestu added the meeting in Nusa Dusa allowed negotiators a few months to try to build momentum before the next formal ministerial level meeting starts in Geneva in August.

The Doha round of talks aim at striking a pact in which wealthy governments, including the European Union and the United States, lower farm subsidies and tariffs in exchange for China, India, Brazil and other emerging economies opening up their markets to imports of farm goods and manufactured products.

All negotiations collapsed in July 2008 over a dispute between the United States and India over how poor nations could raise tariffs when agricultural imports surge.

The last informal ministerial level meeting was in January in Davos and no progress had been achieved prior to the meeting in Nusa Dua.

The meeting of 19 countries in Cairns Group, which represents 25 percent of the world's agricultural exports, ended with a communiqu*, confirming hopes for the conclusion of the Doha Round, which would contribute to economic recovery and demonstrate the benefits of the multilateral trading system.

The group consists of Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica,

Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, and Uruguay.

"I think all of us were significantly impressed by the depth of commitment the new US Trade Representatives brought to the table. A genuine desire to work intensively and urgently to bring about a conclusion to the round. Not just with him, but also with the new Minister from India," group spokesperson, Australia's Trade Minister Simon Crean said at a press conference.

Also speaking to reporters that day, was newly appointed US trade representative Ron Kirk, who expressed his country's support of the group's communiqu* saying that it was ready to listen and work together with counterparts in WTO.

"We are joining our colleague from India in endorsing the pact made by the Cairns Group members. We are ready to work *together*, and we are willing to listen to our colleagues' concerns."

Kirk said the communique's hopes for a successful Doha-round conclusion might be an ambitious target. However, he said, the United States was willing to see any good chance for all related countries in gaining fruitful negotiations.

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Opinion

EDITORIAL

East Asia stands united in battling crisis

Published on June 5, 2009

Region must act swiftly and in cooperation | with the globalised world to restore growth

The joint press statement of the East Asia Summit (EAS) on the global economic and financial crisis issued on Wednesday was self-evident. East Asia is going through a testing time once again. Although it has taken almost six months since December - due to political uncertainties in Thailand - to issue this statement, all intentions and deeds have already manifested themselves.

When the economic tsunami hit Asia in 1997, the region was in ruins. There were huge worries about the future of the region. At the time, its macroeconomic policies and weak financial systems were utterly ill-equipped to deal with the crisis. Then East Asian leaders came together and worked together and everything seemed to improve. They took up painful reforms. Most importantly, they kept their markets free and avoided protectionism.

Last November, the world faced a similar but more severe crisis that impacted on all countries. To restore global confidence and prevent a prolonged economic slump, East Asia must work in tandem with the rest of the world. They came together again in early April for the Pattaya Summit in order to display their common resolve but it was unfortunate that the meeting could not be held. However, at the G-20 Summit in London in early April, the leaders of China, Japan, South Korea, India, Indonesia and Thailand, as the Asean chair, told the two-dozen world leaders about their determination to tackle the global economic and financial crisis together. Furthermore, they would restore confidence, growth and jobs, and promote global trade and investment.

In the past several months, East Asian leaders have responded to the global economic meltdown by reaffirming their determination to ensure the free flow of goods, services and investments. In the statement, they reiterated that they would stand firm against protectionist and distorting measures and refrain from raising new barriers. They called for a prompt, ambitious and balanced conclusion to the WTO Doha Development Agenda. Negotiations, based on progress achieved to date, is necessary and will inject confidence and assist in the global economic recovery. Further regional economic cooperation, trade facilitation and liberalisation will also contribute to making the EAS region a more attractive market and investment destination.

In retrospect, our past experience and common endeavours in 1997 are intuitively telling us what to do. This time, they are acting promptly and agreeing with remedial measures, knowing full well that a further decline in global demand would severely affect their economies. East Asia is ensuring that investment continues to flow into the region. To do that, the global financial system must be healthy. In London, the East Asian leaders together called for a bold and urgent reform of the international financial system, which includes the interests of developing countries. They want to see a more comprehensive, equitable and inclusive system that will enhance partnership between the developed and developing countries.

As we look into the future, both the short- and long-term responses must be discerned. East Asia is determined to strengthen the region's growth potential and expand demand, including through accelerating

basic infrastructure improvement, policies and measures for expanding domestic demand, assistance to the private sector, in particular SMEs. In addition, human-resources development as well as advancing regional cooperation efforts, including Asean integration, will help to ameliorate the economic hardship.

The whole world is watching East Asia, which is blessed with rich resources. Towards this end, it is important that the countries in the region make use of various international organisations and regional think-tanks, such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Economic Research Institute of Asean and East Asia. Their research and contribution will help the region to attain sustainable growth and development in years to come.

East Asia is part of a globalised world with interwoven economies. The region cannot survive alone. The statement shows that the region is ready to act together swiftly before it is too late. We have experienced the dire past and won over it. Now our chances of enjoying a better future are facing an economic threat. We must deal head-on with the current crisis.

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www.nationmultimedia.com

The will to deal imaginatively with a crisis



HUGH
CORTAZZI

London

The report that North Korea had set off a second underground nuclear explosion made headlines here, but European eyes were on issues closer to home, including elections to the European Parliament and the state of the European economy.

The main focus in Britain has been on the crisis of public confidence in members of Parliament and the fiddling over their expenses. This is important in the context of maintaining a healthy democracy, but may appear petty and remote to readers in Japan, for whom the potential threat from North Korea must be particularly disturbing.

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the North Korean threat is the lack of any consensus on how to respond. The North Korean regime has rebuffed direct overtures and declared it will not return to the six-party talks. It has also abrogated the armistice with South Korea and threatened to take retaliatory action if there is interference with North Korean shipping, which the United States and others suspect could transport nuclear arms or materials for export.

North Korean behavior has often been erratic. It is particularly unpredictable at the moment perhaps because of doubts about Kim Jong Il's health and a possible power struggle over succession. North Korean leaders cannot be relied on to act logically or temperately.

The Chinese government is best placed to bring effective pressure on the regime in North Korea, but it seems reluctant to do more than express relatively mild criticism. It apparently fears that an

implosion in North Korea would adversely affect Chinese regions adjacent to North Korea. It may also see the North Korean nuclear threat as a means of keeping tensions in the region at a level advantageous to Chinese leaders. They should bear in mind that the North Korean threat can only spur Japanese advocates of rearmament and the development of Japanese nuclear weapons.

For the present, Japan continues to rely on the American nuclear umbrella, but if the direct threat to Japan were to grow and doubts begin about the ability and willingness of the U.S. to defend Japan, a rightwing government in Japan might feel impelled to withdraw from the nuclear nonproliferation and nuclear test-ban treaties. It could then develop quickly nuclear weapons of its own.

China does not currently pose a military threat to Japan, but the many observers who hoped that growth in the Chinese economy would lead to significant democratization have been disappointed. The Chinese Communist Party has not withered away; it remains in control of the country, and its dictatorship seems to be accepted by the bulk of the population, especially the growing middle class, even as it jettisons the more extremes of Maoist dogma to espouse policies aimed at increasing prosperity.

If China's political system poses no direct threat to Japan, there are other dangers. The world economic depression has had a significant impact on China and has led to widespread unemployment.

So far, the social unrest that many feared has not occurred to any significant extent. But if discontent grows and force has to be used to repress the spread of trouble, some Chinese leaders might be tempted to whip up nationalist fervor against Japan or in support of forcible unification with Taiwan.

A greater threat arises from the possibility that economic friction between China and the U.S. could grow and harm political relations. Japanese

industry is now so closely involved in the Chinese economy that economic friction between China and the U.S. inevitably damages Japanese economic interests.

While the Chinese authorities realize that selling down their holdings of U.S. Treasury bonds would be counterproductive, they also need to recognize the extent of protectionist pressures in the U.S. and demonstrate a willingness to play a constructive part in dealing with the world economic recession.

The Japanese government needs, as Japanese officials understand, to continue to exercise patient diplomacy to try to persuade Chinese leaders to do more to restrain the North Koreans from taking provocative steps and get them to return to the negotiating table. Japanese ill feeling over North Korea's abduction of Japanese nationals in years past inevitably makes it difficult for Japan to offer concessions to North Korea. There is probably little prospect for a repeat of the trips that former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made to Pyongyang, but the Japanese government is unfortunately weak and lacks imaginative and charismatic leaders.

It is sad that when the international situation is as serious as it is, Japan must hold a long-delayed general election and choose between two party leaders trained in the old factional politics of the Liberal Democratic Party. The fact that they are both grandsons of former prime ministers underlines the fact that politics in Japan has not fundamentally changed in half a century.

Personalities still seem to matter more in Japanese politics than policies. The personalities arising through the incestuous party system seem to lack the strength of character, imagination and charisma needed in the present crisis.

Hugh Cortazzi, a former British career diplomat, served as ambassador to Japan from 1980 to 1984.

June events that challenge Washington's assumptions



WILLIAM
PFAFF

Paris

Three recent developments in the Muslim Middle East and Central Asia challenge Washington's conventional assumptions about Pakistan, the Taliban, Lebanon and Iran.

- The first is the revolt of tribesmen against the Taliban in part of Pakistan's northwest tribal area, including the well-known tourist region of the Swat Valley, where the "students of religion" recently infiltrated and seized power from the Pakistani authorities and police. This provoked alarm there and in the United States that the religious extremists are a menace to Pakistan.

This fear was exaggerated from the start; Pakistan has a serious government and army. Now, popular anger at Taliban abuses and imposition of unacceptable religious and social norms has erupted among tribesmen and traditional leaders. The formation of popular militias has resulted in expulsion of the Taliban from the positions they have taken, while Pakistan's army has successfully retaken territories further south, at a cost to the population, blamed on the Taliban, of tens of thousands of refugees. These refugees are a grave problem for a government under stress.

The significance of all this is major: The Taliban with their religious rigor do not automatically win converts among their own people.

However, a second lesson is that American bombing operations in the tribal areas remain the principal force behind the earlier Taliban successes. The important conclusion is that foreign intruders should let the Pakistanis settle their own problems, as they now are doing.

- The second highly interesting development was the spectacular presidential campaign in Iran, which ended with the election Friday. The battle against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his politically conservative and culturally reactionary backers turned into an unprecedented brawl.

Although preliminary results show Ahmadinejad to be the winner, his main opponent, Mir Hossein Mousavi, who led the country during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, attacked Ahmadinejad during the campaign for "adventurism, illusionism, exhibitionism, extremism and superficiality," including his notorious Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism, all disgracing the country internationally.

Ahmadinejad and his supporters attacked Mousavi because his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, a university professor of politics, has assumed a public role at her husband's side in the campaign, and demands expanded higher education for women. They are also attacked corruption amid Mousavi's establishment backers.

The campaign included dramatic television debates on usually forbidden issues of policy and religion, and took to the streets in a way that Western reporters compare with raucous and acrimonious Western presidential campaigns.

There were nightly street demonstrations and weekend stadium rallies with tens of thousands of young participants. To quote *The New York Times*, "Every night, parts of the capital become a screaming, honking bacchanal." This is unprecedented in modern Iran — and surely not the conduct of the "false democracy" that Washington likes to call Iran.

It is true that these are public manifestations that both reveal and conceal shifting rivalries and alliances among the senior clerical forces who intend to have the last word (one more time?). But this is again an affair in which the U.S. will profit from keeping its distance.

- The last item of interest has been the unexpected defeat of the Hezbollah-led coalition in Lebanon's parliamentary election June 7. The winner was an American-supported alliance of familiar conservative Sunni forces with rightist Maronite Christians, including the Phalangists of former President Amine Gemayel.

America's support, which included Vice President Joseph Biden's hint that if America's friends did not win, U.S. financial aid would be ended, caused scandal, and was expected by many to backfire.

That it did not was a surprise of the election. Another was the success of the alliance with Hezbollah of a part of the Maronite Christian electorate, led by Gen. Michel Aoun, a commander during the civil war, when he was a fierce opponent of Syria.

A reason for his new alliance with the Syrian-supported Hezbollah is that his intransigent opposition to all foreign interference with Lebanon's independence has led him to see this independence now mainly endangered by America with its Saudi Arabian allies, together with the major Maronite Christian formations, which include elements that have collaborated with past Israeli efforts to install a puppet non-Muslim regime in Beirut. He no longer thinks Syria and Iran are the major threats to Lebanon. Instead he thinks the danger comes from Wahhabi fundamentalism, backed by the Saudi Arabians, fueled by oil money and the U.S., and hostile to all Christians.

Gen. Aoun's movement wants to end the system of sectarian allocation of political offices in Lebanon, and wants a secular state. The French analyst Nicolas Dot-Pouillard writes in *Le Monde Diplomatique* that Lebanon's political scene is revolutionized by this alliance of a mass movement of Christians willing to collaborate with the Islamist, nationalist, and anti-American Hezbollah.

The alliance won enough votes to continue to play a big role in the national assembly, but neither of the two major coalitions has a mandate to govern alone, so not much short-term change can be expected.

If there is change, it will be caused by whatever happens in the present clash between U.S. President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over Israeli action on settlements and on a Palestinian state. Lebanon may want to stay on its own course, but it is not in a neighborhood where small countries find that easy.

Visit William Pfaff's Web site at
www.williampfaff.com
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A vote for peace in Lebanon

The victory of the March 14th alliance in Lebanese parliamentary elections June 7 is a welcome surprise. For many, the election was a referendum on Hezbollah and the armed resistance movement it represents as well as on the continued influence of Syria and Iran over Lebanese politics.

The victory of the alliance, a Western-oriented group headed by the son of assassinated Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, signals a favorable shift in Middle Eastern politics. The key now is to ensure that the election win translates into establishment of a working government. That is a formidable assignment, given Hezbollah's demand for a veto over Lebanese policy and the factionalism that divides any Beirut government.

Lebanese politics divides along religious lines. One of the most important divisions is between Sunnis, who side with the March 14th alliance, and Shiites, who comprise a third of the population and back Hezbollah. Christians, one-third of the population and another powerful group, are also divided. One faction is headed by Mr. Michel Aoun, a former general. A small number of other Christian parties have joined the March 14th alliance.

Just as important as these divisions is the split between Lebanese who seek Syrian involvement in their politics and those who fear it. Damascus has looked at Lebanon as part of its sphere of influence, and a buffer zone between itself and Israel, which still possesses the Golan Heights, seized in the 1967 war. Syria and Iran support Hezbollah as a means of pressuring Israel. (Hezbollah gets considerable support from Shiites who see it as their champion against Sunni domination and Israel, as well as from Lebanese who applaud its ability to provide basic social services the government fails to offer.)

Opposition to Hezbollah goes beyond mere religious divides, however. Some worry about foreign interference in Lebanese affairs. Others blame the organization for drawing the country into the 2006 war with Israel after the group launched an incursion into Israel and kidnapped two soldiers. That conflict resulted in over 1,000 Lebanese deaths and left thousands homeless.

The March 14th alliance — whose name comes from the date of a popular uprising in 2005 against Syrian interference in Lebanese affairs — comprises Sunni Muslims, Druse and Christian parties. Most observers expected the alliance, which has been in power since 2005, to lose. Party members have been assassinated; the electoral system has been delegitimized by constant opposition complaints; and Parliament has been

nearly paralyzed by actions taken by Hezbollah and its allies. Only a foreign-brokered compromise that gave Hezbollah a veto over certain decisions broke the log jam.

In the election, more than half the voting population — 54 percent — backed the opposition. But an archaic voting system reserves seats for each of 16 recognized religious sects according to a long-outdated census by a formula that splits the legislature equally between Christians and Muslims. The alliance claimed 71 of the Parliament's 128 seats, a solid majority.

Even more surprising was the readiness of the losers to accept the results. There was some grumbling about the electoral system and about vote buying, but even the critics conceded they could not overturn the result. That does not mean they are prepared to quietly accept minority status. Hezbollah continues to dominate Shiite communities. Hezbollah leaders insist that they will not give up the armed struggle. One of its members of Parliament said its weapons were "not to be touched" and that the "resistance was not up for discussion."

The key question is whether the new government will extend the veto that the opposition has enjoyed so far. The country's fractious politics demands a unified government, but the opposition may not want seats in the Cabinet as that would make it responsible for government policy. A veto is far more convenient, and the opposition is threatening to resort to a new campaign of violence if it doesn't get it. Finding a workable solution will take creativity and vision.

The coalition win is a positive development for the region. It is a setback for Syrian attempts to claim a bigger role in the region through proxy control in Beirut. Hezbollah is identified as a terrorist group by the U.S. A victory by it in the election would have created a dilemma for Washington as it presses ahead with peace negotiations. The U.S. had warned that its aid to Lebanon would be affected by the election results; it is not clear how powerful that threat was, but the prospect of a continuing relationship with the U.S. clearly appealed to many Lebanese voters.

Now, a new government must be formed. Horse trading is an inevitable part of that process, but there must be limits to that. The ability to actually govern must not be subject to negotiation. The people of Lebanon deserve a government that works for them, not one that sees their country as a battlefield for foreign interests or as an opportunity to line their pockets. The country's friends must do their best to see that they get it.

Asean ties still strong, says Abhisit

By: BangkokPost.com

Published: 1/06/2009 at 02:37 PM

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who is attending the Asean-Korea Commemorative summit in South Korea, insists that relations between Asean member countries are still close and stable.

He said on Monday that he met leaders from Laos, Cambodia and Burma at the summit and they discussed ways to strengthen bilateral ties and promote investment.

After meeting Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Mr Abhisit said he will pay an official visit to Cambodia on June 12 to discuss investment projects including infrastructure.

He said he would find an opportunity to meet the Burmese leader to discuss the political situation in Burma.

The prime minister visited the wind power plant in South Korea's Jeju island and met Thai businessmen there.

He said the technology of generating electricity from wind energy could be used in some areas of Thailand such as Prachuap Khiri Khan and the three southern border provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala.

However, the government would have to conduct a feasibility study and gather public opinions on this issue first, he said.

Activist seeks justice for Tak Bai victims

Relatives offered help to take legal action

By: KING-OUA LAOHONG

Published: 1/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Human rights and justice advocate Angkhana Neelaphaijit is offering to help relatives of people who died in the 2004 Tak Bai massacre if they decide to take legal action against the authorities in charge of the crackdown. Ms Angkhana, the chairwoman of the Working Group for Justice and Peace, is working with lawyers to study grounds for pursuing criminal or civil action. They will obtain a copy of the ruling on Friday by the Songkhla provincial court which found seven demonstrators had died outside the Tak Bai police station in Narathiwat during a crackdown by authorities on Oct 25, 2004.

The court also found that another 78 demonstrators had suffocated in military trucks en route to an army camp in neighbouring Pattani. Relatives believed the victims were harmed prior to their deaths by authorities. The deaths happened after security forces broke up a large group of demonstrators who had gathered at the Tak Bai police station on Oct 25, 2004, to demand the release of six security volunteers they claimed had been unfairly detained. The Songkhla court was asked by the prosecution to make a ruling on the cause of the victims' deaths, a mandatory process under criminal law.

The court determined the victims had died from suffocation. It added that security officials responsible for the crackdown outside the police station as well as those taking the demonstrators to Pattani were only carrying out their duty. The court also ruled that men in uniform seen assaulting demonstrators as they were being dispersed had acted on their own. Ms Angkhana said a legal avenue was open to relatives who could file criminal and civil action against the authorities.

The court, she pointed out, did not consider the findings of a government-appointed independent inquiry conducted in December 2004. The panel headed by Ombudsman Pichet Sunthornpipit said the deployment of soldiers to contain the Tak Bai protest was a proper response to an emergency at hand. However, the method of breaking up the protest was improper and did not conform to international standards. Ms Angkhana said she and the lawyers would examine the court's ruling before consulting relatives. Relatives are expected to decide in a month's time whether they wish to take the case to court. If so, they would consider whether cases should be lodged individually or as a class action. Ms Angkhana said she may mount a legal challenge against a settlement made when Gen Surayud Chulanont was prime minister.

Some relatives reportedly signed a deal with the government at the time enabling them to get state compensation in return for forfeiting their right to sue authorities over the Tak Bai clash. Ms Angkhana said the deal might contravene the principle of justice because it allowed a potential wrongdoer to escape legal proceedings.

China shuts down 7 'terror cells' in Muslim region

By: AFP

Published: 3/06/2009 at 01:57 PM

Chinese police have smashed seven terror cells so far this year in the country's predominantly Muslim far-western region of Xinjiang, state media reported. The China Daily said the cells were uncovered in Kashgar, China's westernmost city and a key centre of culture for Uighurs, the Muslim ethnic group that has long bridled under Chinese rule. No further details about the cells were given by the newspaper, which attributed the information to Zhang Jian, the city's Communist Party chief.

But it quoted Zhang as saying the region faced an ongoing threat from terrorists who "remote control" local operatives from abroad via the Internet. "Now the battle against terror has extended to the virtual world as the terrorists use the Internet as their tool to spread their radical ideas," he said. China has long claimed it faces a deadly threat from Muslim separatists as justification for extremely tight controls in Xinjiang, a region of vast deserts and towering mountains that borders central Asia.

However, Uighur exile groups accuse Beijing of inflating the threat as an excuse to suppress their culture and ethnic identity. Xinjiang is home to about eight million Uighurs, a Turkic ethnic group. Zhang was quoted as saying Kashgar, an ancient Silk Road trading post, has seen 350 attacks resulting in the deaths of 60 government officials and civilians "since the 1990s." In April, China executed two Uighur men in Kashgar for what it calls a "terrorist" attack last August in the city aimed at sabotaging the Olympics and that left 17 policemen dead, state media reported.

The incident was the most serious in a wave of unrest in Xinjiang ahead of and during the Beijing Olympic Games. China arrested almost 1,300 people for terrorism, religious extremism or other state security charges in the region last year, state media reported in January.

PM calls urgent meeting on southern unrest

By: BangkokPost.com

Published: 4/06/2009 at 03:50 PM

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva will on Friday chair a meeting of agencies in charge of security operations in the southern border provinces plagued by the separatist insurgency. He said the meeting will discuss restructuring of some of the agencies and imposition of the Internal Security Act in the region, in line with the government's policy to concentrate on development in the area. The prime minister said the results of security operations over the past five months in the South were not satisfactory even though the number of incidents had dropped.

"It's difficult to get everything done in just five months but I have instructed officials to be more cautious," he said. One reason for the lack of progress was that authorities adhered to old practices. The government would do the best it could to ensure the security of the people. The prime minister admitted the government had received many warnings of possible attacks on teachers since the new term started. "We will do our best, but it's a large area so it's impossible to guarantee [public safety] 100 per cent," he said.

Mr Abhisit said the situation in the South would be raised at talks during his official visit to Malaysia on Monday. His comments came shortly after insurgent attacks which left three policemen and two teachers injured in the southern provinces of Yala and Narathiwat on Thursday morning. In Yala, a roadside bomb exploded as a group of police escorting teachers went past, injuring three policemen. Another bomb went off behind the Sungai Padi train station in Narathiwat, injuring two female teachers.

Fourth Army commander Lt-Gen Pichet Wisaijorn subsequently called a meeting of security officials in the three southernmost border provinces to review security measures for school teachers. Col Prinya Chaidilok, the Region 4 Internal Security Operations Office spokesman, said southern insurgents have lately been targeting teachers and their security escorts. This had been very demoralising for teachers. Security measures need to be fully reviewed to ensure more effective protection for teachers, Col Prinya said.

Education Minister Jurin Laksanavisit said he would ask the cabinet for 388 million baht to increase the hazardous duty allowance for teachers in the southern border provinces. Mr Jurin said the allowance would increase from 1,000 baht to 1,500 baht per month and be retroactive, from October 2008 to September 2009. A total of 21,603 teachers under the Office of the Basic Education Commission in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and four districts of Songkhla would benefit from the increase, which would hopefully lift their morale, he said. Mr Jurin said he went to Narathiwat on Wednesday for talks on improving teachers' security.

Malaysia calls for calm over border dispute with Indonesia

By: AFP

Published: 4/06/2009 at 11:57 PM

Malaysia's deputy prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin called for calm Thursday amid reports that Malaysian warships had entered oil-rich waters off northeastern Borneo also claimed by Indonesia. Indonesia says Malaysian warships entered the disputed Ambalat area in the Sulawesi sea last week and that an Indonesian navy ship came within moments of firing at a Malaysian vessel. "We want to avoid any form of provocation that can cause unpleasantness. We must handle the matter with caution," Muhyiddin was quoted as saying by Bernama, the Malaysian news agency.

Muhyiddin was also quoted as saying that Malaysia had good relations with Indonesia and that it did not want to cause any problem that could hurt ties. In Jakarta, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said Indonesia would never back down from a fight but that dialogue was the best way to resolve the dispute. "The government has never been lenient on the border violations committed by Malaysian warships in Ambalat waters," Yudhoyono said during a talk show on Antevu TV station.

"Although we have to drive intruders away, we don't need to open fire on them unless absolutely necessary," he added. International borders in the area off Borneo island have yet to be determined, with each country claiming the area as its own. Malaysia claims the area based on a 1979 maritime chart, while Indonesia bases its claims on the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which states the area belongs to Indonesia.

Muhyiddin said the Malaysian security forces patrolling the Ambalat waters had performed their duties responsibly and in accordance with regulations. "Both parties must avoid any action that can raise controversy," he said. Meanwhile, Malaysia's military chief Abdul Aziz Zainal denied that Malaysian warships had entered the waters around Ambalat, adding that he would visit Jakarta Tuesday to discuss the issue.

Insurgents kill 5 in far South

By: AFP

Published: 5/06/2009 at 05:22 PM

Five people were killed in a series of attacks in the far South on Friday, as Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva met with top brass to discuss security measures there. Police said five men -- two army rangers, two school guards and a local politician -- died in four separate attacks. A 52-year-old Muslim man, the chief of a tambon administrative organisation in Pattani province, was killed by in a drive-by shooting around dawn.

Three hours later two school guards -- a 41-year-old Buddhist and a Muslim -- were killed in separate drive-by shootings in a nearby district. Just before midday, two army rangers on foot patrol in the same district died instantly in a roadside bomb blast that also wounded two other members of the patrol.

The latest attacks came amid a flare-up in the insurgency that has wracked the Muslim-majority area on the Malaysian border for more than five years and claimed more than 3,700 lives. Mr Abhisit was due to meet with top defence staff on Friday afternoon in Bangkok to discuss the government's strategy for dealing with the separatist violence.

On Thursday the prime minister defended his government's handling of the situation in the south since he took power in December. He admitted that the government had been warned of possible attacks on teachers after the recent start of the new term. Schools and teachers are frequent targets of attacks in the south because militants see the education system as an effort by Bangkok to impose Buddhist Thai culture on the mainly ethnic Malay region. The insurgency in southern Thailand erupted in January 2004. Buddhist-majority Thailand annexed the former ethnic Malay sultanate in 1902, leading to decades of tension.

Finding it hard to explain southern unrest abroad

By: ACHARA ASHAYAGACHAT

Published: 5/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: News

Thailand cannot rest easy and keep the southern conflict a matter of status quo, as long as efforts to internationalise the issue are gaining momentum and inhumane casualties have become the order of the day for people in the three southernmost provinces. The continued slaying of teachers, including the tragic murder of Atcharaporn Thepsorn, who was eight months pregnant, is a case in point. At the ground level, the government is caught in a dilemma, whether it should go for counter-terrorism with a human face approach, or a more stringent and heavy-handed measure against the insurgency networks and their sympathisers.

Should it abolish martial law and lift the emergency decree which provide a level of immunity for authorities in case some operations turn nasty, and use only the more comprehensive one-year-old Internal Security Act instead? At the international level, every Thai government has had to try hard to explain the southern situation and appease the concern of the world of Muslim elite - if not to try to abort the separatists' international lobby - when the issue pops up annually at the foreign ministerial meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Last year, Thailand succeeded in defusing the ill-intentioned efforts led by the Pattani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) to push the pan-Islamic OIC into issuing a separate resolution on Thailand's southern problem.

Over the past several years, Thailand had had to lobby for a toned-down version of resolutions, final reports and declarations to be issued at the end of the annual talkshop so they would not hint or lead to any misinterpretations that Thailand could lose its sovereignty as far as the southern issue is concerned. There has been more homework for Thailand to do during the past two years, as the "opposite side" has been trying hard to raise Thailand's southern unrest to the level that it deserves a separate statement instead of being lumped together among other issues in the resolution on minorities in non-Muslim countries. The May 23-25 OIC meeting in the Syrian capital of Damascus decided to defer consideration of a draft resolution regarding the situation of the Muslim community in southern Thailand until the next council.

The pan-Muslim organisation will certainly not give up on the issue. They hang on to what the previous governments have promised to do and keep them informed. Somehow successive Thai governments have not done much to enrich the channel the former foreign minister Surin Pitsuwan has paved for us since 1998, when he brought Thailand to become an observer at the 57-member organisation. The OIC secretary-general Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu claimed at the Damascus meeting that he has undertaken many initiatives aimed at solving problems in the Philippines, Burma and Thailand among others, to reach out to Muslims and identify their needs. What the Muslim elite was looking for is a greater level of self-governing for Muslims in the country's deep South, comprehensive economic and social support from the Thai government and greater expression of the different cultural identity.

Certainly, the Pulo demand is much more than that, but the Thai diplomats, both veterans and the young ones, did not lower their guard. Panich Vikitsreth, assistant foreign minister and head of the Thai delegation to the OIC meeting, conceded that it was tough and the Thai authorities might have to consolidate efforts to deal with the issue in a more systematic manner. "We might have to look into our own process, perhaps communicate more with them [OIC] or they will seek a re-visit to Thailand in a more justified manner," said Mr Panich. Thanks to several friends such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, Bahrain, UAE and Pakistan, Thailand could temporarily abort the Pulo-led efforts, he said. He also informed the plenary meeting of the Thai government's peaceful and reconciliatory approach based on His Majesty the King's advice to "understand, reach out, and develop".

Mr Panich emphasised that the Abhisit administration would work closely with all stakeholders, including legitimate representatives of the people of the southern border provinces towards the betterment of the region and would attach the utmost importance to the administration of justice, by engaging with civil society organisations to ensure a transparent and accountable means of justice. The head of the Thai delegation made it clear that the relationship between Thailand and the OIC, and the Islamic *ummah* at large, would not be based only on the issue of the southern border provinces but on broader economic ties. Still, it seems Thailand and the OIC elite are speaking in different tones.

Associate Professor Jaran Maluleem of Thammasat University's faculty of political science, said after returning from a trip to Saudi Arabia this week, that the OIC secretariat had the perception Thailand was not willing to communicate frankly with them. "They said if Thailand wants to invest and trade with the Muslim world, we need to solve the southern conflict in a thorough and transparent manner first," said Mr Jaran. He added that the message was quite strong. If they felt there has been no progress in the attempt to improve the Muslim population's social and economic status, they would continue with the now-pending draft separate resolution at Tajikistan next year.

Mr Jaran and some other Muslim academics had extensive discussions with heads of the OIC department of minorities and culture as well as secretary-general of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. These people advised that Thailand should reap the most benefit from its status as an observer, as the pan-Muslim body is applying a moratorium while other applicants such as India and the Philippines are still on the waiting list. It is quite understandable that as the Muslim Ummah are observing the southern problem from far away, it is difficult for them to have a sympathetic grasp on Thailand's position. After all, the situation has not seemed to improve for their colleagues down South. As a retired Muslim diplomat said, the magnitude and layers of complication of the southern issue have been there for several decades. There is no better way to solve it but to try to be alert and not complacent and continue on the path we believe is right.

Teachers demand better protection

Two more colleagues injured in bomb attack

By: POST REPORTERS

Published: 5/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Injuries suffered by two more teachers in a bomb blast yesterday prompted the Confederation of Teachers in the Southern Border Provinces to demand that security forces beef up protection for its members. Confederation chairman Boonsom Tongsrirai yesterday said teachers expected greater coordination from soldiers to secure routes and protect schools from insurgent attacks.

Militant attacks on four teachers in the past two days underlined the gaps in the security forces' plans, he said. Jariya Suwannakhet, 30, and her sister Piwan, 27, were critically wounded yesterday in a bomb explosion in Narathiwat's Sungai Padi district. A 5kg homemade bomb exploded about 8am by the roadside as more than 10 teachers were passing in a 10-vehicle security convoy. The sisters were on their motorcycle ahead of the convoy.

Ms Jariya received shrapnel wounds to both legs and Ms Piwan was left with extensive shrapnel wounds to the body. In Yala, three policemen in a teacher escort team were wounded yesterday morning in a roadside bomb attack in Raman district. A school located near the blast site was closed for the day. Following the blast, security authorities met to discuss changes in protection measures to boost teachers' morale.

The bomb blast took place just two days after a grisly attack on teachers on Tuesday in Narathiwat's Rangae district. Two female teachers, one of them eight months' pregnant, were shot on their way home from school. Militant suspect Haseng Suki, 35, was arrested yesterday in Rangae in connection with Tuesday's attack. Police also seized more than 100 items believed to be used in bomb-making. Mr Haseng denied all allegations made against him.

More than 100 teachers have been killed or injured since the southern violence erupted in 2004. Mr Boonsom said the confederation did not want the attacks to disrupt classes but he could not rule out the possibility of cancelling classes if more teachers were targeted. "I'm worried about the situation," he said. "If it does not improve, I am uncertain [about closing more schools]." Army chief Anupong Paojinda yesterday said there were up to 7,000 insurgents in the far South. Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban was reported to be travelling with the army commander in the region yesterday to follow up on multi-billion-baht development projects. Gen Anupong also vowed to visit the region every week to obtain first-hand information.

Philippine militants free female hostage

By: AFP

Published: 7/06/2009 at 11:57 AM

Islamic militants have freed a Filipina hostage after more than four months in captivity in the southern Philippines, according to police. Leah Patris, an employee of a local micro-finance company, was recovered early Sunday near Sumisip town in Basilan island, a provincial police chief said. Senior Superintendent Salik Macapantar said pursuit operations by police and military forces pressured the gunmen into leaving her behind.

The woman, whose age has not been divulged, was then taken to a Marine base on the island, where she was undergoing medical evaluation before being reunited with her family, Macapantar said. She was seized by militants with known links to the Abu Sayyaf group on February 3. The Abu Sayyaf is blamed for the country's worst terrorist attacks, including bombings and high-profile kidnappings. It is on the US government's list of wanted foreign terrorist organisations.

The female's release came four days after Abu Sayyaf militants also on Basilan island freed Sri Lankan peace activist Umar Jaleel, who was seized the same month as the Filipina. Abu Sayyaf are still holding Eugenio Vagni, a 62-year-old Italian Red Cross worker kidnapped on the nearby island of Jolo in January along with a Filipina and a Swiss colleague. The two other hostages were freed in April.

EDITORIAL Did you hear what he said?

Published: 8/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: News

Words are important, particularly from national leaders laying out policy to neighbours and the world. Thus, many hung on the speech by US President Barack Obama, billed as an address to the Muslim community. As expected, the speech was eloquent, and stressed the common culture and values of his country and Islam. With one glaring exception, it contained no new political initiatives. Yet, both overtly and subtly, it set a new tone in the way the US leader intends and hopes to approach the global problems which involve the superpower. To many, that means it was different from the post-9/11, George W Bush era. Certainly, it was more respectfully considered by most of the Muslim world than any speeches in the latter days of Mr Bush.

In truth, however, Mr Obama actually said nothing that contrasted or contradicted Mr Bush. He intends to keep the US secure, to pursue al-Qaeda throughout the world and the Taliban in South Asia. He respects the great religion of Islam, which has millions of followers in the US. But he emphasised that he also wants a "new beginning" in relations between his country and Islam.

That will be difficult. In many ways, it is an issue of apples and oranges. Islam is a worldwide religion, without a leader or formal grouping. The US is a well-defined nation with Mr Obama at its head. No Muslim or Muslim-majority nation speaks on behalf of Islam; Mr Obama is the exclusive spokesman for the United States. No true or respectable Muslim has acted violently against the United States; only the US president can order violence abroad. And while the US has one foreign policy aimed at making the country secure and prosperous, Muslims worldwide set their political and economic priorities by vastly different national and regional circumstances.

One vital concern of Muslims and the US is the Middle East. Mr Obama dwelt on the responsibilities of the people of that region and their friends. In his only specific initiative, he stated clearly that both Israel and the emerging state of Palestine have the right to exist. This finally states a proper goal of US policy, but puts pressure on both hard-line supporters of Israel and those anti-Jewish leaders Mr Obama was addressing in the Muslim world, including both close US ally Saudi Arabia and the confrontational Iran.

Mr Obama's speech unfortunately failed to stress that Islam and democracy are fully compatible. It was disappointing that he honoured the monocracy of President Hosni Mubarak's Egypt for his address. Indonesia, the nation of his own boyhood, is both the world's most populous Muslim nation and industriously building a democratic system.

The backdrop of Egypt adds to such troubling US images as demoting human rights as a topic of concern with China, and reconsidering its strong opposition to the odious dictatorship in Burma.

Mr Obama is good at idealistic speeches, but is a realist. He noted frankly that one speech is not going to mend US-Islamic relations, or even to change them much. But he may get a better result. His words and actions are combining to show that the US intends to remain secure, but has no ambitions against Muslim lands, let alone Islam itself.

Any successful effort to suppress extremists and halt terrorism must be worldwide. It must include Muslims, if only because so many terrorists today try to use Islam to justify their murderous acts. Millions listened to Mr Obama's speech, and many heard the sensible words. It was an excellent start to a long and difficult task of making a better world.

PM visits Malaysia for talks on southern unrest

By: BangkokPost.com

Published: 8/06/2009 at 04:01 PM

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said he is optimistic he will see an end to the violence in the South and promised new opportunities for people in the restless border provinces after talks with his Malaysian counterpart on Monday. Mr Abhisit was speaking at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur. "Let me reiterate that my government's approach is based on the belief that the key to peace and security is justice and opportunities," he said.

Mr Abhisit said he had invited the Malaysian government to help revamp the syllabus of Islamic schools in the southern region. He agreed to the Malaysian leader's suggestion that as prime minister he should visit schools which teach Islam in the three troubled southern provinces this year as a demonstration of the government's support. Prime Minister Najib Razak told reporters that both leaders were optimistic about the future of Thailand's southernmost provinces.

"We remain optimistic that things will get a lot better if we continue emphasizing economic development and giving them a better future," he said. On Monday, militants killed a rubber tapper and blew up an army vehicle, wounding nine soldiers. The rubber worker was shot dead and a bomb planted on a road wounded nine soldiers in Narathiwat, police said. The nine soldiers were on teacher escort duty when the explosive device was detonated under their patrol vehicle around 6am.

The injured soldiers were taken to a hospital in Rueso district, where two were reported in a critical condition. In neighbouring Yala province, a Muslim rubber tapper was shot dead in Bannang Sata district. Arsae Kama, 39, of tambon Bajoh in Yala was shot six times while he was working in the plantation, police said. Villagers said they heard the shots but were afraid to enter the plantation as insurgents may have planted bombs around the area.

Three killed, 26 wounded in weekend terror attacks

Narathiwat's Yi-ngo is hardest hit district

Published: 8/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: [News](#)

Three people have been killed and 26 injured in suspected insurgent shooting and bomb attacks in Yala and Narathiwat provinces. In Narathiwat province, local defence volunteers Madaree Muhi and Makueta Talohdeng were shot at 11.40am yesterday by a suspected insurgent wielding an M16 assault rifle at a clock tower intersection in Yi-ngo district. They were sent to Narathiwat Ratchanakharin Hospital where Makueta succumbed to his injuries. At the same time, a bomb exploded in front of a pharmacy in tambon Yi-ngo municipality.

The explosive was stuffed in a 50kg cooking gas cylinder, placed on a truck outside the store. The impact of the blast killed Saravoot Nibuesa, a 47-year-old second-hand goods dealer, and injured 19 others, who were sent to Narathiwat Ratchanakharin Hospital. In Yala province, Ekayuth sae Darn, 35, was shot on Raman-Yala Road in Raman district of tambon Kayubor at 7.15am. A mechanic and village defence volunteer, he was riding his motorcycle home after taking his wife to work at a petrol station. A man on a motorcycle drew up on Mr Ekayuth's right and shot him in the back. Mr Ekayuth was admitted to Yala provincial hospital.

In Rueso district in Narathiwat, four paramilitary rangers were ambushed by men armed with M16 assault rifles on a road in Ban Kor Tor village. Sgt Maj Direk Pongkhaek, 46, Private Veerapol Saengsuk, 26, Haya Nima, 27, and Ahama Jehmi, 29, from the 3014th company of the 46th paramilitary ranger regiment in Ban Yalaebo village, were attacked by rebels waiting in a thick forest by the roadside. The rangers, who were patrolling on three motorcycles in Ban Kor Tor village, fired back until the attackers fled.

All four rangers as well as villager Yakoh Sija were injured, and sent to Rueso and Narathiwat Ratchanakharin hospitals for treatment. Matchay Yama, a 57-year-old deputy director of Ban Palukapaeroth School, was shot dead on his way home from daily prayers at a mosque in Ban Palukapaeroth village of Bacho district, Narathiwat, on Saturday. Police said attackers shot Matchay in the head and neck as he was passing an orchard. Pol Lt Col Prateep Suksan, a police interrogator, said the victim worked for police as an informant on the local insurgency.

Former Singapore PM visits Burma: officials

By: AFP

Published: 8/06/2009 at 02:57 PM

Former Singapore prime minister Goh Chok Tong visited Burma, officials said, amid international pressure on the military regime to halt its trial of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi. Goh was set to meet Burma's junta chief Senior General Than Shwe, Prime Minister Thein Sein and other senior officials on the "goodwill" trip, a Burma official and a Singaporean statement said. The visit comes just days after the Singaporean government said that expelling Burma from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) was not the way to bring about reform in the army-ruled country.

"Mr Goh Chok Tong arrived in Rangoon this afternoon to start his four-day goodwill visit," the Burma official, who did not want to be named, told AFP. "He will meet with Senior General Than Shwe and other senior leadership in Naypyidaw (Burma's remote administrative capital) on Tuesday." Singapore said that Goh was visiting Burma for the first time in 11 years at the invitation of Thein Sein, after the Burma premier visited the island city state in March. It said Goh would "use the visit to update himself on developments in the country" but did not mention Aung San Suu Kyi, who is on trial on charges of breaching her house arrest that could leave her in jail for up to five years.

Goh is now a senior minister in the cabinet of his successor, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. Goh succeeded Singapore founding father Lee Kuan Yew -- Lee Hsien Loong's father -- as prime minister in 1990 and stepped down in 2004. He will visit Burma's second largest city, Mandalay, and also officially open a hospital in Rangoon completed with Singaporean assistance as part of a recovery plan following last year's devastating Cyclone Nargis, it said. Burma has faced rare criticism from fellow members of Asean, including Singapore, in recent weeks since it put Aung San Suu Kyi on trial over a bizarre incident in which an American man swam to her lakeside house.

Last month Singapore said it was "dismayed" by the charges against her and urged the junta to release her. But the Singaporean government added that Asean should not expel the most troublesome of its 10 member nations, saying that the bloc will have greater influence on Burma by maintaining dialogue. Burma's ruling generals have kept Aung San Suu Kyi in detention for 13 of the past 19 years since refusing to recognise her party's landslide victory in elections in 1990.

Insurgents cause more strife

By: BangkokPost.com

Published: 9/06/2009 at 12:27 PM

Insurgents exploded a bomb, set fires and blocked roads, causing havoc in several areas of Yala province on Tuesday morning. Two people were injured by the blast. In tambon Sateng Nok of Muang district the Yala-Wang Phraya road near Prama village was blocked with tree trunks and burning tyres before dawn. Metal spikes were also scattered on the road. Police were sent to clear the road shortly after 5am. About 6.30am a cardboard box and an old gas cylinder, suspected to be a home-made bomb, were found by villagers in the middle of an intersection in the municipality of tambon Kota Baru in Kota Baru district.

Soldiers and bomb disposal police were sent to the area and opened fire on the package from a safe distance. The box contained only rocks and the gas tank was empty. About the same time, tree trunks and a box were found blocking a road at Meeding village in tambon Noen Ngam in Raman district. The Yala-Betong road was also blocked with logs at Kasang village in tambon Tano Pute in Bannang Sata district. A power transformer on the same road was set on fire. In Krong Pinang district, a suspicious-looking box was reported on a road passing Upae village. Police found it contained only rocks and sand. At nearby tambon Purong in Krong Pinang district, a road was also blocked with three trunks.

About 8am a bomb went off at an oil depot near a Yala Transport Co bus terminal on Thana Vithee road in Muang district. Two people were wounded, one seriously. With the continuing escalation of the violence, and particularly the targeting of teachers and their escorts, three schools in Raman announced they will close temporarily for security reasons. They are Ban Kiat, Ban Ba-ngoy and Ban Mai Kaen schools. Teachers were also warned to be even more careful when travelling. Yala governor Teera Mintrasak said he will meet with local business operators to come up with more effective security measures in public places such as fuel stations, markets and other commercial areas.

Army commander-in-chief Anupong Paojinda left for the far South on Tuesday morning for urgent meetings with security chiefs there following the massacre by gunmen at a mosque in Narathiwat province on Monday night. At least 12 people were reported to have died and 11 more been seriously wounded by unidentified gunmen who attacked them at evening prayers on Cho Airong district. Gen Anupong said he could not say for sure who was responsible for the mosque shootings since no one had claimed responsibility yet, but he condemned the gunmen for their barbarous and cruel act.

The government must think carefully before implementing its plan to replace the state of martial law in the southern border provinces with a new security law, he said.

The budget funding allocated for the deep South was sufficient, he said. Authorities were still operating on the budget for fiscal 2009. The southern militants wanted to discredit the government and raise the level of violence because they wanted to be recognised by the international community, he said. Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban, who is in charge of security affairs, would visit the three southernmost border provinces on Saturday, Gen Anupong said. Supreme Commander Songkitti Chakkrabat said the southern unrest has been around for a long time but has steadily intensified of late.

The armed forces were on top of the situation but they needed time to resolve the problems in the region, Gen Songkitti said. He believed the situation in the three southern border provinces would eventually return to normal, like in other regions of the country, and people there would again live together happily. However, all sides must cooperate and work in one direction. Mr Suthep said separatist militants wanted to impose power by killing innocent people, while the government had been continually trying to cooperate with Muslim communities in the region.

He would meet members of the committee for developing the South on Wednesday and the cabinet would meet to discuss the southern problem at 5pm on Thursday. He confirmed he would visit the far South at the end of the week. Mr Suthep said there were an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 southern insurgents. The government was trying to change their views through education and development in the region.

Impartial probe needed into mosque attack

By: Veera Prateepchaikul

Published: 9/06/2009 at 12:32 PM

The attack on a mosque in Narathiwat in which 11 people were killed and many wounded, and a string of brazen roadside ambushes and bombings elsewhere in the far South, is a clear indication that those behind the violence are still capable of killing and maiming at will despite the heavy presence of the security forces. The murderous assault on the Alkulkon mosque in Cho Airong district of Narathiwat on Monday night capped two weeks of escalated violence in the southern border provinces. Four teachers were killed, one of them eight months pregnant, and dozens of ordinary civilians and members of the security forces slain or injured - with the authorities placing the blame on separatist insurgents.

While it is still not clear who were responsible for the atrocity at the mosque, it should be condemned in the strongest terms and the perpetrators, whoever they are, must be brought to justice. Security authorities were quick to point the finger at militants, claiming the attack by at least three hooded gunmen was intended to drive a wedge between the ethnic Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists in the violence-prone region by stirring suspicions. Many Muslims in the region harbour deep-seated suspicion and mistrust of state authorities, feeling they have been unfairly treated for many years, and they might not be easily convinced who was behind the attack. In fact, they might have a totally different viewpoint.

As such it is imperative that an investigation, preferably by an independent panel to pre-empt Muslims' suspicion of partiality, must be launched immediately to clear the air. A similar attack on a mosque occurred in Yaha district of Yala in April two years ago in which 11 worshippers were wounded. The assailants were never identified. Although authorities suspected militants were responsible, many Muslim villagers thought otherwise. The surge of violence in the far South since May 19, starting with the killing of a male schoolteacher and then a string of shootings and bombings is a clear indication that those behind the violence still operate and move about almost at will, despite the heavy presence of armed troops and police - which now total more than 50,000.

Although authorities claim they have won back the trust of many Muslims and have curtailed the number of incidents, it is evident that the scale of the violence has escalated, and a lot more needs to be done to bring peace and order in the region. During his visit to Malaysia, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said he and his Malaysian counterpart, Najib Razak, had discussed ways of improving economic conditions and the education system in southern Thailand. As Thailand's closest neighbour, Kuala Lumpur's cooperation in these areas is indeed welcome. Equally important is the need for the two sides to cooperate even more closely on security matters, as the southern insurgency is not only a threat to Thailand but also a potential threat to Malaysia, given the radical brand of Islam displayed by the insurgents.

Twelve die in mosque shooting Malaysia offers helping hand in restive South

By: BANGKOK POST AND AGENCIES

Published: 9/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

NARATHIWAT : At least 12 Muslim villagers have been killed and 11 seriously injured when a group of unidentified gunmen opened fire in a mosque in Cho Airong district. The shooting took place about 8.30pm on Monday, when about 100 worshippers were performing evening prayers inside the mosque at Ai Payae village. Those not killed ran screaming with fright and pain from the mosque. Witnesses said a group of five to six gunmen broke into the prayer hall from undergrowth behind the mosque and began firing indiscriminately. Ten of the worshippers died instantly and two more in hospital. Eleven others were seriously injured. The gunmen fled the scene after the shooting.

Authorities last night blocked all roads in the area to search for the attackers, who are believed to be hiding in a nearby forest. Prinya Chaidilok, spokesman for the Internal Security Operations Command's frontline office of the 4th Army, denied authorities were involved in the shooting. He was trying to put a stop to rumours that security forces had tried to provoke the situation in the far South for their own benefit. He said it was premature to come to any conclusion on who launched the attack. But the attackers knew the area very well. The attack came on the eve of another visit to the far South by army chief Anupong Paojinda.

The shooting came hours after Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva wrapped up a one-day visit to Malaysia with the insurgency high on the agenda. Malaysia has pledged to help young Muslims in Thailand secure a better education and employment to ease violence sparked by the Islamic separatist movement. Leaders of the two countries yesterday discussed ways to bring economic progress to southern Thailand, including Malaysia's role of providing scholarships for Muslim students and helping to develop the education system in provinces bordering northern Malaysia.

"In terms of creating opportunities particularly for young people in the area, I think that Malaysia has very important contributions," Mr Abhisit told reporters after a meeting with his Malaysian counterpart, Najib Razak, in the administrative capital of Putrajaya. Mr Najib said he and Mr Abhisit plan to visit a religious school in southern Thailand in order for both leaders to talk to the people "so that the right kind of message can be transmitted" to the South. No date was immediately scheduled for the visit.

"We remain optimistic that things can get a lot better if we continue to put an emphasis on economic development, on giving them a better future," Mr Najib said. Mr Abhisit said he was also optimistic about seeing an end to violence in his country's troubled southern region, and pledged to bring "justice and opportunities" to the land. "Let me reiterate that my government's approach is based on the belief that the key to peace and security is justice and opportunities," he said. Mr Abhisit said his government was shifting emphasis in the troubled southern region to economic development. In addition to the mosque shooting, there were other incidents of southern violence yesterday. Rubber tapper Chuay Nadi, 36, was shot dead in an attack in the pre-dawn hours in Narathiwat's Rangae district on his way to a rubber plantation.

Police later came across a 5kg homemade bomb near the crime scene, which was believed to be targeted at authorities as they carried out their investigation. A bomb disposal team was called in to defuse the device. A security escort team for teachers escaped unharmed in a roadside bomb explosion on the Yala-Betong Road in Krong Pinang district, police said.

Thai army chief denies forces behind mosque attack

By: AFP

Published: 9/06/2009 at 01:57 PM

Thailand's army chief denied claims that security forces were to blame for a bloody attack on a mosque in the country's troubled Muslim-majority south that killed 11 people. The government ordered General Anupong Paojinda to fly to the volatile region a day after masked gunmen stormed the mosque in Narathiwat province and sprayed worshippers with bullets during evening prayers. Villagers blamed Thai forces for the attack, one of the worst incidents in a five-year insurgency in the south, but Anupong said separatist militants were responsible for the "barbaric act."

"After the attack militants made false claims against the authorities. They want to terrify villagers by creating a climate of fear," he told reporters in Bangkok before leaving for Narathiwat. "On the contrary, the authorities are building a better understanding with villagers and everything is being implemented under the law and in accordance with human rights," he said. About 1,000 sombre villagers gathered near the mosque in Cho-ai-rong district on Tuesday to see the scene of the attack and attend a religious ceremony for the dead, witnesses said. Locals collected the bodies of eight of the dead, including the local imam, on Tuesday morning and took them to makeshift tents near the mosque to clean them for burial.

Several villagers said they believed security forces had carried out the raid, saying that the masked gunmen had attacked the mosque from several sides and that insurgents would not strike at a place of worship. "I don't know who the perpetrators are, I have to wait for the authorities to investigate and answer the villagers' doubts," Abdul Rausa Aree, chairman of the Narathiwat provincial Muslim council, told AFP. Suthep Thaugsuban, deputy prime minister in charge of national security, said he had sent army chief Anupong to the south to bring the culprits to justice.

"I have instructed Anupong to go down south to monitor the situation and find the perpetrators. I will not say anything until I have received the official report as it's a very sensitive issue," Suthep said. Human rights groups have previously accused Thai authorities of major abuses in the south, including the use of unnecessary force in the 2004 siege of a mosque in which 32 suspected insurgents were killed. Monday's attack came amid a sudden flare-up in the insurgency that has left 3,700 people dead since 2004 and just hours after the Thai and Malaysian Prime Ministers agreed to step up cooperation over the region's troubles.

"We thank the Malaysian government for the close cooperation and support on the matter, in both security and socio-economic aspects," Thai premier Abhisit Vejjajiva was quoted as saying by Bernama, Malaysia's national news agency. The two countries, which have often been at loggerheads over the region, would discuss cooperation in "education, employment and entrepreneurship," Abhisit was quoted as saying. Army chief Anupong said the militants were trying to "internationalise" the situation in the south.

"They absolutely want to raise this issue to a level of international concern, by making it seem like state authorities are violently cracking down on villagers," he said. Violence has spiked in the south recently, with 27 people dying and 68 injured since last Tuesday. Many of the dead were security forces or teachers. Tensions have simmered in the south since Buddhist-majority Thailand annexed the former ethnic Malay sultanate in 1902. But the current rebellion began on January 4, 2004 when militants raided an army base, also in Cho-ai-rong district, killing four soldiers and stealing weapons.

Indonesia says to ratify nuclear treaty after US

By: AFP

Published: 9/06/2009 at 08:57 AM

Indonesia offered a boost to President Barack Obama's vision of a nuclear-free world, pledging to ratify a treaty banning nuclear tests if the US Senate does. Obama said in April said he would ask the Senate to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), part of his ambitious goal of eliminating nuclear weapons unveiled in a speech in Prague. Indonesia is one of nine countries including the United States that need to ratify the treaty, which would ban all nuclear explosions everywhere for any purpose, to come into force. "We share his vision of a world in which nuclear weapons have been eradicated," Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda said on a visit to Washington.

"We trust that he will succeed in getting the CTBT ratified -- and we promise that when that happens, Indonesia will immediately follow suit," he said at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Wirajuda spoke before a meeting with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who visited Jakarta in February in a sign of the new US administration's interest in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation. While Obama's anti-nuclear initiative was mostly well-received around the world, one holdout from the treaty -- North Korea -- brazenly defied it by testing an atomic bomb last month.

The other nations that have not ratified the treaty are India and Pakistan, which both refuse even to sign it, along with China, Egypt, Iran and Israel. Indonesia operates nuclear reactors but does not have nuclear weapons. Wirajuda said the threat of a "nuclear holocaust" had been growing until Obama's initiative. Wirajuda said Indonesia was ready to help the United States negotiate with North Korea and Iran, which is suspected of seeking nuclear weapons. Indonesia maintains friendly relations with both Tehran and Pyongyang.

Clinton, in her meeting later with Wirajuda, said the Indonesia and the United States were committed to building "a comprehensive partnership based on mutual respect and mutual interests." "The world's second and third largest democracies "share a commitment to democratic values, human rights and a vibrant civil society," she said. "The American people have the greatest respect for what the Indonesian people have accomplished in the last decade," she said, referring to the archipelago's transition to democracy.

She announced a 10 million-dollar grant to support higher education in Indonesia, including English-language teaching. Obama spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, an experience he credits with giving him a greater understanding of the Islamic world. In turn, Obama is wildly popular in much of Indonesia, in contrast to predecessor George W. Bush. Wirajuda lavished praise on Obama's speech last week in Cairo, in which the US leader called for a "new beginning" with the Muslim world after years of mutual suspicion.

The foreign minister called it "one of the greatest speeches I have ever heard from a world leader." As the foreign minister visited, the US-Indonesia Society -- which promotes ties between the two nations -- released recommendations to develop a partnership between the two countries.

It called for an end to a ban on US military training of Indonesian units accused of human rights violations in the past, saying that Washington should instead only blacklist individuals over wrongdoing. Clinton said the United States was ready to discuss "closer relations" between the two countries' militaries. In their news conference, Clinton and Wirajuda also said they would work together to try to free Burma's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi who is being tried by the military junta.

Outrage over 'senseless attack'

Sorrow and anger engulf a village in the South following a violent assault that killed 10,

By: Bangkok Post and AFP in Narathiwat

Published: 10/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: [News](#)

Villagers at Ai Payae are outraged at the deaths of 10 people killed by an unidentified group of gunmen who stormed a mosque while they were performing evening prayers. More than 1,000 villagers attended prayers at the Al-Furqan mosque in Cho Airong district yesterday to pay their respects to the victims.

Security was heavy, provided by more than 100 troops. Villagers condemned those behind the attack. The 8.30pm shooting on Monday also left 12 worshippers seriously injured. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva yesterday expressed "deep regret" over the attack.

"I am worried and regret this attack that has killed or wounded so many people," he said after the weekly cabinet meeting. "My government will do its utmost to improve the situation. The sooner we resolve the case the better, otherwise they [militants] will use this incident to incite further unrest."

Deputy Interior Minister Thaworn Senneam visited the villagers yesterday and apologised to the families of the victims on behalf of the government and security officials for failing to provide them with adequate protection.

Narathiwat governor Winai Kharuwanapat and senior provincial security officials later explained to the villagers that the attackers aimed to provoke conflicts based on misunderstandings between Buddhists and Muslims.

The officials also told the gathering the separatist movement was attempting to mislead the villagers into believing the attack was the work of state officials. The assault, they said, was purposely so violent so villagers would not believe those behind the attack were from the same community. Many villagers are convinced security forces are to blame, saying insurgents would not strike at a place of worship.

"I don't know who the perpetrators are," said Abdul Rausa Aree, chairman of the Narathiwat Islamic Council. "I have to wait for the authorities to investigate and answer the villagers' doubts."

EDITORIAL The challenge of the South

Published: 10/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: News

The atrocities of the past week in the South, capped by the unprecedented massacre on Monday at the Al-Kulkon mosque, must serve as a warning. The government and security forces are not simply stymied in this bloody conflict. They are in imminent danger of losing - if not the actual confrontation, then the confidence and energy of this vital part of the country. For some two weeks, violent forces have dominated the news and destroyed lives and property at will. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and others have appeared unable to influence the clearly deteriorating situation.

Mr Abhisit's flying visit to Malaysia on Monday had tragic overtones. Just before he left to discuss the South with his counterpart Najib Razak, insurgent bomb and death squads killed two people and wounded 19 in attacks on volunteer guards and a business block. Just after he returned, armed men burst into a mosque in Narathiwat province and opened fire on defenceless worshippers at evening prayers. Ten innocent men were killed and 12 others were wounded.

The mosque attackers and bombers escaped. So did the men who shot and killed two teachers last week, one of them eight months' pregnant. Still at large are the men who attacked and bombed a pickup truck carrying other teachers home. Also running free are the men responsible for attacks on schools in several southern districts the day after schools reopened. Thousands of rangers, police and soldiers were unable to detect the planting of eight bombs in and around Yala province town on the day of the Red Cross Fair, or to find those responsible.

The past week has again demonstrated in the most bloody terms that the violent gangs of the South strike when and how they want. No one can doubt the bravery and dedication of the security forces on the scene in the South. They often achieve good results, by arresting extremist followers or finding a bomb before it goes off.

The truth, however, is that the men and women defending the South, and the solid citizens of that region, are being worn down by a bloody-minded force they know little about. Last week, Mr Abhisit admitted as much, and held a conference with security chiefs in Bangkok. In just three days following his pledge to rethink southern strategy, the bombs and bullets have taken an horrendous toll.

Mr Abhisit's visit to Kuala Lumpur was distressingly familiar. He and Premier Najib Razak discussed the same old plans, harking back to the Thaksin days, of aiding the deep South in building economic prosperity, creating opportunities, building vocational skills.

And it might be helpful if such plans ever materialised. But the South has become a major security problem. It is contained, but it continues to grow and could break out of the region. The scale of violence requires a critical rethink of policy. Mr Abhisit needs to set aside or delegate the dreams of economic development. He must follow through on last week's promise to come up with new strategy and tactics to suppress the violent gangs and treat this as a matter of urgency.

He must also follow up on his promise to give justice to the South, where little fairness actually exists. The barbaric attacks of these past weeks in the South present a clear challenge to the government. Mr Abhisit must rise to the situation, take clear steps to protect southern people and provide them with true justice. Otherwise, he will be in danger of losing the confidence of that beleaguered region.

FROM THE BARRACKS

South suffers from political preoccupation

By: Wassana Nanuam

Published: 11/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

In the wake of the mosque shootings - which happened right on the heels of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's security meet-up with Malaysia - the impact is being felt by both the government led by the South-based Democrat Party and the army led by Gen Anupong Paojinda. With more than 35,000 soldiers deployed in the three southernmost provinces, plus more than 60,000 officials under the Internal Security Operation Command (Isoc), the situation has shown no sign of improvement.

Could this be a case of misplaced priority?

Against the background of the political crisis with people dividing into groups and fighting one another, both the government and the army have been so preoccupied with the problem of political instability that they have had no time for other issues. This is especially true with the army, which has had a key role to play in politics since the Sept 19 coup. Even when the country had a Muslim army chief, the southern unrest did not get better. In fact, the former army chief Gen Sonthi Boonyaratkalin, now an aspiring politician, gave a brief but revealing analysis of Thailand's pressing problems at the time when he was in power.

He said the political problems and the need to prevent former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra from returning to power were at the "heart" of the matter, the foremost missions for the government to accomplish. The southern insurgency meanwhile is like sore feet. It may hurt but it won't kill. When the heart is in bad shape, the sore feet can wait, so to speak. Gen Sonthi interpreted the insurgency to be less of a threat to the country than bringing Thaksin home to face imprisonment and subduing the red-shirt movement loyal to the ousted prime minister for reasons of political stability.

The diagnosis has certainly been called into question after hefty amounts of resources and manpower have been exhausted treating the infected feet for years without any sign of the wound healing. Gen Sonthi had all the might at his disposal as the supreme leader of the coup-making body, the National Security Council, to put the chronic insurgency problem right when he had a chance. Yet months flew by and the security strife endured while the authorities were preoccupied with staving off the political influence reportedly wielded by the fugitive Thaksin from afar.

Gen Sonthi was literally charting the country's destiny. Why he chose the perceived, insidious Thaksin menace over the real bloody southern violence left many stupefied when he should have rectified the two problems at the same time. Despite the enormity of resources channelled into the attempts to contain Thaksin, the country still reels from an irreconcilable polarisation between people who wear different coloured shirts who descended on the streets to make their voices heard. It did not go unnoticed that the unrelenting southern unrest popped up in the headlines periodically with reports of massacres perpetrated often after authorities told the public that the violence had shown signs of improvement.

The authorities are up against an unknown enemy in the South. They do not know to which organisation the insurgents belong, whether they have any affiliation with which the government could negotiate and strike a ceasefire deal. The army has been the central nerve of the operations to combat the insurgents. Gen Anupong, however, had to fight many battles, including one for his own survival. He managed to avoid an anticipated purge from both the Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat governments, branded as stand-ins for Thaksin who holds a grudge against the man who took part in the coup that ousted him. When he first took the post, Gen Anupong stated he would leave politics alone and give the southern flare-up his full attention. He insisted security deserved a restructuring of the fighting forces with a commitment of money and personnel to wipe out the insurgency.

His words were backed by the deployment of major generals to head elite task force units in Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, which are the main separatist hotbed provinces. Gen Anupong wanted to show he recognised the gravity of the five-year-old security upheaval by spelling out that the problem was not the exclusive task of the Fourth Army overseeing the South but the entire army. On a positive note, the army chief has been making regular visits to his subordinates on the front line and approved procurements to better arm them. The procurements, including 85 armoured cars and mobile phone jammers, were costly but necessary for defusing remote-controlled bombs.

On a less positive one, there are complaints from the field that the army chief's visits might not be that useful without a real insight into the situation that can provide a better strategy to cope with it. After all, Gen Anupong climbed the career ladder in the First Army whose jurisdiction borders Cambodia to the east. The South separatist warfare, therefore, may not be his forte and he does not come across as a fighter commander either. Critics are still out over Gen Anupong's tactic in mobilising a 30,000-strong force based in other regions to the South. The scale of the troops, who are not accustomed to reining in the insurgents in unfamiliar territory, inarguably constitutes an all-out offensive. Such mobilisation could end up a crushing defeat for the army if it loses out to the pockets of "street bandits", as Thaksin once called the southern insurgents.

The huge mobilisation of troops may have also raised the profile of the insurgents unnecessarily. The army could have assigned the business of rooting out the militants to the Fourth Army and stood back with reinforcements at the ready. Some soldiers may look back on their roles in recent months with a deep sigh. The political agenda has taken the soldiers further away from their real duty which is to safeguard territorial integrity. Some of them have been deployed to repel rioters or foster community relations in a covert operation to disintegrate the pro-Thaksin red-shirt alliance. Instead of facing off against enemies outside the borders, the soldiers have found themselves shooting blanks at demonstrators who think along a different political line.

The soldiers' mission to rebuild peace in the strife-torn South may also be a way to regain their pride and professionalism. So far, though, the government's attempt to curb the raging security hostility has made little headway. Whether it is the "feet" or the "heart" that should be saved first, it is Gen Anupong's call to make now. But something is abundantly clear, and that is the southern strife will not disappear just because the army wishes it so. Wassana Nanuam reports on military affairs for the Bangkok Post.

China demands Uighur return, Palau denies aid link

By: AFP

Published: 11/06/2009 at 02:57 PM

China has urged the United States to repatriate Uighur "terrorist suspects" soon, after the tiny Pacific nation of Palau agreed to temporarily resettle up to 17 detainees from Guantanamo Bay. "China urges the US to implement the UN Security Council's relevant resolutions and its international obligations on counter-terrorism," foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters. "(The US should) stop handing over terrorist suspects to any third country so as to (repatriate) them to China at an early date."

News of the demands from Chinese authorities follows relief among many Uighur exiles over the US decision to send the detainees to Palau, but there have also been questions raised over the future of the 17 Uighur men. US authorities cleared the men of wrongdoing four years ago, saying they only had a camp in Afghanistan. But they have been stuck ever since in the controversial US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba as no one else would take them. Palau's President, Johnson Toribiong, has meanwhile moved to defend his country's decision to take in the detainees saying it was not linked to the upcoming review of US aid to the tiny Pacific nation, describing the action as a "humanitarian gesture."

Toribiong told local reporters that the decision was not linked to the review of aid under the Compact of Free Association between Palau and the US, which administered the UN Trust Territory until independence in 1994. Washington has refused to hand the Uighur detainees over to China over fears they would suffer torture. But US lawmakers shot down President Barack Obama's plans to resettle at least some of them in the United States, alleging they still posed a security risk. Xinjiang, a vast area that borders Central Asia, has about 8.3 million Uighurs, and many members of the mostly Muslim community say they have for decades suffered under Chinese political and religious persecution.

The United States earlier repatriated five Uighurs to Albania, where they lived without incident and landed low-profile jobs such as making pizzas. China had pressed Albania and other nations not to take in more of the Uighurs. Nury Turkel, a Uighur-American lawyer who is part of the men's legal team, voiced appreciation to Palau but said it was hardly ideal to send men from the mountains and deserts of China's Xinjiang to an equally remote island.

"It's good that they can walk freely, but the decision wasn't made looking at their future, such as whether they can integrate into a society where they don't have any cultural or linguistic links," Turkel said. Amnesty International said the Palau deal raised more questions than it answered, including whether the men could be reunited with their families or receive support to adapt to their new home. Obama has vowed to shut down the Guantanamo Bay camp, seen by many both at home and abroad as a symbol of excesses conducted in the name of his predecessor George W. Bush's "war on terror."

The United States is finalizing a 200 million-dollar package for Palau, which was under US administration until 1994. But State Department spokesman Ian Kelly denied any link with the transfer of the Uighurs. Palau has little to lose in relations with Beijing -- it is one of six Pacific island nations that recognize Taiwan rather than China. Congressman Bill Delahunt, a member of Obama's Democratic Party, voiced regret the United States did not take responsibility itself to accept the men.

Invoking America's first president George Washington, Delahunt pledged to make amends by using his position to expose the plight of Uighurs under Chinese rule. "Palau's President Johnson Toribiong maybe read the words of George Washington to 'give refuge to the virtuous and the persecuted,'" Delahunt said. Representative Dana Rohrabacher, a conservative Republican who rarely finds common cause with the Democrats, blasted members of his own party for calling the men "terrorists," saying they had fallen for Beijing's line. "It's a very despicable attempt to try to frighten the US public at the expense of 17 innocent human beings," he said.

Suthep visits deep South

By: BangkokPost.com

Published: 13/06/2009 at 11:25 AM

Deputy Prime Minister for security affairs Suthep Thuagsuban on Saturday morning left for Narathiwat by an army plane to inspect unrest situation in the far South.

Mr Suthep stated that he will visit the mosque in Cho Airong where 11 people killed and 12 other seriously wounded in the Monday night's massacre. He insisted that state authorities were not behind the incident as speculated. The deputy premier also disclosed that the government will come up with more stringent security measures in order to bring back peace and order in the restive South.

The deputy premier was accompanied by Defence Minister Gen Prawit Wongsuwan and army chief Gen Anupong Paojinda. He is scheduled to return to Bangkok at about 3.30pm today.

Obama warns N.Korea a 'grave threat'

By: AFP

Published: 16/06/2009 at 11:58 PM

US President Barack Obama warned nuclear North Korea was a "grave threat" and said he would not tolerate the Stalinist state's provocative strategy of extracting rewards with belligerent behavior. "North Korea has abandoned its own commitments and violated international law," Obama said, alongside Lee during his first appearance in the White House Rose Garden with a foreign leader.

"Its nuclear and ballistic missile programs pose a grave threat to (the) peace and security of Asia and to the world." Obama offered Kim Jong-Il's reclusive state a way back to "full integration" to the global community through talks, but only if it verifiably dismantled its nuclear programs -- and warned of stern consequences if it did not.

"There's been a pattern in the past where North Korea behaves in a belligerent fashion, and if it waits long enough is then rewarded with foodstuffs and fuel and concessionary loans and a whole range of benefits," he said. "The message we're sending -- and when I say 'we,' not simply the United States and the Republic of Korea, but I think the international community -- is we are going to break that pattern."

Obama also vowed to defend South Korea and said Washington planned "serious enforcement" of sanctions against the North, a week after the UN Security Council tightened controls on arms shipments involving the hardline state.

And the US president said measures were being discussed with other regional partners involved in six-party denuclearization talks, namely China, Japan and Russia, "to make it clear to North Korea that it will not find security or respect through threats and illegal weapons."

After talks and lunch at the White House, Lee welcomed assurances that his country remains under the US security umbrella and said Obama, who advocates an eventual end to nuclear weapons, made clear it included the US nuclear deterrent. "This has given the South Korean people a greater sense of security," Lee said. "We agreed that under no circumstance are we going to allow North Korea to possess nuclear weapons," Lee said.

On one major issue for Lee, he said that he and Obama had agreed to working-level talks to advance a free trade agreement -- which the US leader had branded as flawed before taking office. Obama said he was "committed" to advancing the free trade deal but refused to put a timeline on it, admitting that differences remained over exports of US beef and cars to South Korea.

Pyongyang sent East Asian tensions into overdrive last month with its second nuclear detonation, which followed what Washington said was a disguised test of a long-range missile in April. Obama came to office offering negotiations with the North, but Kim's government has grown ever more defiant.

On Saturday, the North vowed to build more nuclear bombs and start enriching uranium for a new atomic weapons program, in response to the new UN sanctions. Some analysts have speculated that the saber-rattling is primarily rooted in an attempt by ailing 67-year-old Kim to bolster a succession plan involving his youngest son, Kim Jong-Un.

The United States stations some 28,500 troops in South Korea and more than 40,000 more in nearby Japan, which also has tense relations with Pyongyang. Lee, a conservative businessman, took over last year and delighted many in what was then George W. Bush's Washington by reversing a decade-long "sunshine policy" under which South Korea put few restrictions on aid to the impoverished North.

The latest nuclear showdown with North Korea is clouding the fate of two female US journalists jailed by Pyongyang last week for 12 years. Official North Korean media said Tuesday that Laura Ling, 32, and Euna Lee, 36, had confessed to a politically motivated smear campaign. Washington has said it considers the case of the reporters as separate from the nuclear row and has been trying to win their release.

There has been growing speculation in Washington meanwhile that North Korea may soon conduct its third nuclear test. Lieutenant General Patrick O'Reilly, head of the Missile Defense Agency, said that North Korea was also aggressively proliferating weapons overseas. "There is an extensive effort going on to sell North Korean products," he said in testimony to the Senate.

DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL

Published: 16/06/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: News

Peace-building attempts in the deep South suffered a major setback on June 8, when unidentified gunmen burst into a mosque in Cho Airong district of Narathiwat province during evening prayers, and sprayed worshippers with automatic weapons.

Eleven Muslim villagers were killed and 12 others wounded in the brutal attack.

No one has claimed responsibility for the indiscriminate slaughter, leading to speculation that ill-intentioned people are trying to deepen mistrust and tension between Muslims and Buddhists in the troubled region.

A large number of soldiers has been sent to the three southernmost provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat over the past five years to quell acts of militancy _ all to no avail.

The June 8 attack showed that government authorities must do more to ensure justice and equality in the Muslim-dominated region.

Army chief Gen Anupong Paojinda also stressed the need to win the hearts and minds of locals through cultural, social, educational and economic development.

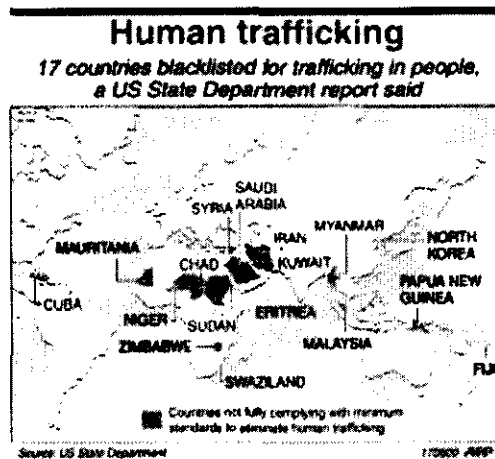
This longstanding problem has caused a great loss of life and damaged the local economy. All peace-loving Thais must express their sympathy and support for the southern people who have lost their loved ones. Security officials on the ground must also realise that justice is key if peace-building efforts in the region is to succeed.

Malaysia outcry at US trafficking blacklisting

By: AFP

Published: 17/06/2009 at 01:58 PM

Malaysia has accused the United States of unfair treatment over its decision to re-list the country on a human trafficking blacklist.



World map showing the countries blacklisted for human trafficking, based on a new US State Department report. Malaysia has accused the United States of unfair treatment over its decision to re-list the country on a human trafficking blacklist.

Washington's annual "Trafficking in Persons Report", released yesterday, says Malaysia is failing to comply with minimum standards to eliminate trafficking and "is not making significant efforts to do so".

Last year the report elevated Malaysia to a "watch list" from the 2007 blacklist after finding that it was "making significant efforts" to comply with standards.

"It is unfair to put us back on the list as we are doing our best," Malaysian Deputy Home Minister Abu Seman Yusop told reporters.

"We will have to consider our next action in opposing the re-listing of our country on the blacklist," he added.

Abu Seman said the Malaysian government did not condone human trafficking and had taken stern action to deal with the problem, including enacting an anti-human trafficking law in 2007 and setting up a special task force.

The report said that while the Malaysian government took early steps to fight sex trafficking, it has yet to fully tackle labour trafficking.

It said there were "credible allegations", including those in a US Senate report this year, that some immigration officials took part in trafficking and extorting refugees from Burma.

Malaysia, which is listed with 16 other countries, including six newly-added African nations, could face sanctions such as the withholding of non-humanitarian, non-trade related US aid.

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak said recently his country was being used as a transit point for illegal immigrants.

Recent incidents include the arrests of 17 Iraqis and seven Indonesians over the weekend after authorities intercepted a boat that was trying to smuggle some of them to Australia via Indonesia.

Authorities have said 12 suspected illegal immigrants were drowned off Malaysia's southern coast in the last two months when they tried to sneak out of the country.

PM: Insurgents not linked to al-Qaeda

By: Bangkok Post.com

Published: 17/06/2009 at 11:32 AM

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva says he does not believe the insurgents operating in the far South of Thailand are linked to the al-Qaeda network.

The government knows who it is fighting in the southern border provinces, he said. The insurgent groups active there had no clear organisation like that linking the terrorist operations in the Middle East .

His comments follow the arrest by Thai security officials of three Rohinya allegedly involved in passport forgery and human and weapons trafficking.

They were believed to be linked to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka, which the Colombo government now claims to have been totally defeated, and insurgents in the far South.

They were also suspected of links with the al-Qaeda network.

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

ASEAN nuclear ambitions alarm the West

Lilian Budianto , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Mon, 06/01/2009 6:41 PM | World

As North Korea's recent nuclear test raises tensions in Asia, ASEAN members' nuclear programs are ringing alarm bells in the Western world already irritated by Myanmar's military junta.

Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines have already notified the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of their intention to operate nuclear power plants in the near future as an alternative to non-renewable energy resources.

Indonesia relies on coal, oil and gas to generate electricity for its population of 240 million. Along with the rise in industrial production, the government has sought to develop four nuclear plants that could support 2 percent of its electricity demands by 2017.

Similarly, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam all aim to either build or operate nuclear power plants by 2020, while the Philippines has plans to revive its closed Bataan nuclear power plant.

Myanmar's notorious junta, which has been subject to Western economic sanctions because of its poor human rights record, has attracted the most criticism over its plan to develop nuclear reactors. In 2002 it was reported that the Russian government had agreed to help the military junta build a nuclear research facility that would be used to develop reactors for medical and electricity resources.

The United States has shunned Myanmar's nuclear plans, saying Yangon has neither the legal framework nor the provisions that would safeguard its nuclear program from posing a security threat.

"Nuclear power and nuclear arms are different sides of the same coin. Every nuclear-power-wielding state can turn into a nuclear-armed nation," said Tessa de Ryck, an anti-nuclear campaigner from Greenpeace Southeast Asia.

"North Korea is an example. Once a country possesses a nuclear power plant, it is hard for the international community to restrict ambitions to develop nuclear weapons."

The global community has failed to persuade North Korea from nuclear testing, and big powers like China have ensured economic support for Pyongyang. China has also provided economic support for Myanmar, undermining economic sanctions imposed by the West.

Ten ASEAN members signed the 1995 Bangkok Treaty that outlined a nuclear-free zone and an agreement not to abuse nuclear technology. However, precedents have shown the bloc has no leverage in meddling in the domestic affairs of member countries in case of any standoffs.

Myanmar has become the center of attention recently over the fresh trial of opposition leader and Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for 13 out of the 19 years since her party won a landslide victory in 1990. ASEAN leaders have come under fire for their leniency toward Myanmar at a time when the West has been considering imposing yet more sanctions on Myanmar.

"No one can ask Myanmar to adhere to the human rights commitment they made under the ASEAN Charter that entered into force last year," said Bantarto Bandoro, the chairman of the Indonesian Institution for Strategic Studies. "If Myanmar later abuses the nuclear plant to produce arms, there would be no one that could ask them to stop."

Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia have signed the United Nations' Non-Proliferation Treaty, but so far, only Jakarta has ratified it.

Greenpeace has predicted that nuclear power plants in the ASEAN region would be able to produce up to 200 nuclear

bombs a year, considering it takes only 5 kilograms of plutonium to make a nuclear warhead.
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ASEAN, S. Korea to foster 20 years of ties

Veeramalla Anjaiah and Ary Hermawan , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Mon, 06/01/2009 12:56 PM | Headlines

After bellicose North Korea's provocative nuclear missile tests in recent weeks, South Korea's President Lee Myung Bak is hosting a commemorative summit meeting with ASEAN leaders at Seogwipo, Jeju Island this week to cement the partnership between South Korea and the 10-member bloc organization.

With warplanes, ships and thousands of security personnel tightly guarding Jeju Island, the leaders of the ASEAN and South Korea will meet on Monday and Tuesday to celebrate 20 years of relations.

South Korea and ASEAN first established sectoral dialogue relations in November 1989 and became a full Dialogue Partner in 1991.

With its 48 million people as well as a highly developed modern economy worth US\$1.2 trillion annually, South Korea is an important trading partner and foreign investors for ASEAN. The regional bloc has 570 million people and a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$1.3 trillion.

"I think ASEAN needs South Korea to develop its economy, as reflected in many bilateral meetings held by the two parties. South Korea also sees ASEAN as a significant regional entity," chairman of the Indonesian Institute for Strategic Studies Bantarto Bando said, adding that the 20th summit highlighted the collaboration between East Asia and Southeast Asia. Last year, South Korea's trade with ASEAN countries stood at \$90.19 billion. It exported \$49.28 billion worth of goods to the ASEAN countries and imported \$40.91 billion goods from the regional bloc.

In 2008, South Korea invested some \$5.85 billion in all ASEAN countries, except Brunei.

The summit meeting has a wider agenda.

"The Summit, which has the theme 'Partnership for Real, Friendship for Good', is expected to provide leaders with the opportunity to review dialogue relations and explore ways to strengthen cooperation in political and security, economic, finance and social-cultural areas, the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta stated in a press release sent to The Jakarta Post last week.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono left Jakarta on Sunday on a three-day trip to Jeju Island, despite his ongoing presidential election campaign.

"This is an important event to improve relations between two regions in Asia. President Yudhoyono's attendance highlighted the importance of cooperation between ASEAN and South Korea," House of Representatives' Commission I member Yuddy Chris-nandi, from the Golkar Party, said. He said ASEAN and South Korea have had strong economic ties with the peninsular nation being one of the biggest investors in the region. "The crucial issue that should be addressed is, 'how can both parties achieve a common perception on the economy'," he said, adding that Southeast Asian nations could benefit a great deal from Korea's advanced technology. "They are better than us in terms of technology. We can make our production systems more efficient by learning from them."

Indonesia, whose bilateral trade reached \$19.25 billion (\$11.32 billion in exports and \$7.93 billion in imports) with South Korea in 2008, is South Korea's second biggest trading partner in Southeast Asia, after Singapore. Seoul also invested \$719.10 million in Indonesia in 2008.

For his part, South Korea's ambitious President Lee Myung-bak, who has the nickname "bulldozer", called for a new

partnership among the 11 countries to meet future challenges.

"As we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of our friendship, let us bring together our vision and usher in a brand new era of green partnership," Lee, who spent a great deal of time in Indonesia and other ASEAN countries during his earlier career as a businessman, wrote in an article in this newspaper recently.

Lee, who was chosen by the Time magazine as an "Environmental Hero" for his "Low Carbon Green Growth" initiative, said climate change was a daunting challenge that requires a global effort.

"Korea and ASEAN can become the world's pioneering leaders *in climate change mitigation*. We can become the world's green research hub that introduces new innovations and turn green ideas into reality," Lee said.

The leaders may discuss the present global financial crisis and other regional issues.

Bantarto said ASEAN-South Korea relations would deepen and become more interdependent amid the global economic downturn. "The challenge is to determine how they can minimize the impact of the crisis," he said. The nuclear tension with North Korea and the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi, he said, may be discussed at the meeting, as both parties have interests in security and human rights. "The two issues have become global concerns," he said.

The summit has come at an appropriate time.

In six months time, beginning Jan. 1, 2010, the ASEAN-ROK (Republic of Korea) Free Trade Area agreement will take effect. Under the FTA, ASEAN products will enjoy duty-free treatment in South Korea, as Seoul will eliminate import duties on about 90 percent of ASEAN products. South Korean products will also enjoy similar privileges in the ASEAN 6 countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines and Brunei).

"With the realization of the ASEAN-ROK Free Trade Area in 2010, consumers in ASEAN and ROK will have access to cheaper products originating from the free trade area," the ASEAN Secretariat stated.

During the two-day summit, the economic ministers of 11 countries are expected to sign an investment pact under the Framework Agreement on the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation, which was signed in 2005.

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Pakistan's war on terror crucial to global security: Envoy

Ary Hermawan , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Wed, 06/03/2009 2:36 PM | World

The word "terrorism" was virtually Greek to most Pakistanis before 9/11. Not until the US government invaded Afghanistan in 2002 for hiding Osama bin Laden did the people in Pakistan actually realize their backyard had become a hotbed of ferocious transnational terrorists.

The creeping Talibanization of the northern part of Pakistan, one of the country's most developed touristic areas, is triggered by no other than the US and NATO forces' failure to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistani Ambassador to Indonesia Maj. Gen. (ret) Ali Baz told

The Jakarta Post in a recent interview in Jakarta.

"You can imagine the magnitude of the problem: A superpower, assisted by 27 countries, has not been able to restore Afghanistan. So Pakistan, obviously, has to bear the burden as we are the first American ally for the war on terror *in the region*."

Pakistan shared borders with the Taliban-controlled areas in Afghanistan. It has citizens of the same tribe as the Taliban (the Pashtuns) who live near the border belt, some of whom have become Taliban. Those extremists, Ali Baz said, had slowly infiltrated the Swat Valley, Pakistan's most modern and peaceful valley.

"The Taliban very intelligently chose their target because they want to destroy the tourism sector. In the past four years they have been creeping into this valley."

As they grew stronger and posed danger to Pakistanis, the government launched a military operation against the Islamic militants, but this was stopped shortly when a new democratic government came to power in 2008. It wanted to resolve the problem through peaceful means. But the soft approach did not last more than a month as the Taliban refused to surrender their arms.

On May 8, Pakistani Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani announced there would be no more peace deals with the militants and the government would launch a massive military operation against them.

Ali Baz said the war on terror conducted by the Pakistani government was crucial to global security as the Taliban, who are believed to recruit extremists from various nationalities, posed a threat to the whole world.

"They are resisting and getting their weapons from abroad, from certain powers who do not want to see Pakistan become a stable state," he said, adding the Taliban included Arabs, Afghans, Uzbeks, and "God knows how many others".

During the operation, the military captured American weapons from the Taliban and are now conducting further investigations. Many American convoys were looted in Afghanistan, Ali Baz said, and their weapons were snatched.

Analysts have criticized the Islamic country's latest offensive against Taliban, saying that it would increase the risk of terror attacks in more stable and peaceful areas. The Taliban militants claimed they were responsible for the recent suicide attacks in Lahore and Peshawar last week.

The Pakistani government, however, had been prepared for the backlash, Ali Baz said.

"The backlash is there; but the attacks are also signs of frustration."

He said the government was also upbeat that the public in general would not be disheartened by the suicide attacks, which could result in declining support for the operation.

"All political parties and all ulema are now behind the government," he said, adding even the radical elements in Pakistan are supporting the offensive after knowing that the Taliban fighters also kidnapped and beheaded innocent people.

"They are not Muslims, they are ferocious animals. People who kill other people are not even human beings," he said, referring to the widespread perceptions in Pakistan about the Taliban.

Pakistan is now expecting support from the international community in the offensive that has displaced 2 million people, which the ambassador said had only added to the existing 3 million Afghani refugees who fled the country during the Soviet war in the late 1970s.

"They have caused a lot of burden," he said.

The international community has promised US\$225 million to give the internally displaced people (IDP) shelter, food and medicine, but it was far from sufficient as the government said they needed at least \$1.5 billion.

"We request that from the government of Indonesia and anybody else who wants to donate something. The prime minister's account has been open for these IDPs," the ambassador said.

The estimated \$1.5 billion, he said, did not include the cost of reconstructing the region affected by the war and four years of living under Taliban rule.

"Schools and hospitals have been destroyed," he said.

He said the success of Pakistan's campaign against the Taliban was important to maintaining global security, given the prevalence of the Taliban-linked extremists in many countries.

"If the war on terror in Pakistan fails, the world fails. And that's what America is most worried about."

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RI to send diplomatic note to Malaysia over Ambalat

Erwida Maulia , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Wed, 06/03/2009 11:05 PM | National

Indonesia has decided to resolve its border spat with Malaysia over the oil-rich Ambalat waters off East Kalimantan through diplomatic channels.

The move comes amid escalating tensions and widely spouted war rhetoric caused by Malaysia's frequent incursions into the disputed area.

Indonesian Navy Chief of Staff Adm. Tedjo Edhy Purdijatno said at a press conference Wednesday he would send a letter, through Indonesian Military (TNI) chief Gen. Djoko Santoso, to Foreign Affairs Minister Hassan Wirajuda, requesting a diplomatic note.

The call for diplomacy comes just before scheduled border talks between the two countries.

Tedjo added Indonesia would not increase its military presence in Ambalat, but said it would continue guarding the area with its current six warships and three military aircraft.

"We'll continue to guard the border and take measures that are in line with regulations and the President's directives," Tedjo said after a meeting with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

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Australia, Indonesia discuss border protection

Lilian Budianto , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Wed, 06/03/2009 6:39 PM | World

Australian home minister Bob Debus met with Indonesian justice minister Andi Mattalata on Wednesday to discuss border protection measures, following a series of attempts to smuggle people through the border between the two neighbors.

Debus led a delegation, which also included National Security Adviser Duncan Lewis and People Smuggling Ambassador Michael Potts.

Debus said Canberra had allocated an additional A\$654 million in the 2009-2010 budget to tackle people smuggling and stabilize displaced populations in the region.

Australia has become a frequent destination of either people smuggling or refugees from Asia and Middle East. A group of Afghan refugees died after the rickety boat they boarded to Australia exploded in the Indian Ocean recently.

"Our strengthened border security measures will enable us to identify people smugglers, intercept people smuggling ventures and prosecute people smugglers," Debus said.

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A strong Asia-Pacific defense and security

Kevin Rudd , Singapore | Wed, 06/03/2009 2:34 PM | Opinion

In June last year, I proposed the development in the long term of what I have called an 'Asia-Pacific Community' (APC). An APC could help ensure that the process of regional, economic and financial integration keeps moving forward.

An APC could also help to nurture a culture of cooperation and collaboration on security, including a culture of military transparency, helping to build confidence and security-building measures by providing information that reassures neighbors, rather than alarms them.

An APC could also provide a vehicle for discussion and cooperation across the range of challenges with trans-national reach, such as climate change, resource and food security, bio-security and terrorism. Just as ASEAN built a strong measure of strategic congruence within Southeast Asia between many countries of different political systems and, at times, with active hostilities towards one another, so also could an APC over time build up a sharper sense of security community across our wider region. An APC could be seen as a natural broadening of the processes of confidence, security and community building in Southeast Asia led by ASEAN, while ASEAN itself would of course remain central to the region, and would also be an important part of any future APC.

The regional groupings and institutions already in place in the Asia-Pacific region all make valuable contributions. ASEAN, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Plus Three, the ASEAN Regional Forum and other bodies are doing important work in enhancing economic and other forms of cooperation. As part of our regional conversation about the future of our institutions, we can draw strength from their accumulated experience.

That was my goal in appointing a special envoy on the Asia-Pacific community Richard Woolcott, a distinguished Australian diplomat, who, together with others, did much of the diplomatic legwork in the formation of APEC 20 years ago. Woolcott visited capitals in the region to discuss the APC proposal over the last 12 months. He has now provided his report to me, and I would like to outline some of his key findings and where we might go from here.

First, there has been broad agreement on the value of a focused discussion about how regional architecture can best serve all of our interests in the future. Everyone seems to have been keen to put forward their view about the idea of developing an APC and, understandably, these views are far from uniform. This is something that I welcome. The whole point of this initiative is to begin the conversation about where we need to go.

Second, there is widespread recognition that our current structures do not provide a single forum for all relevant leaders to discuss the full range of political, economic and security challenges we face in the future. Thirdly, it is clear that no one wants more meetings. There is no appetite for additional institutions. It is difficult enough for leaders to make it to the range of meetings that we already have and, coming from Australia, where every meeting involves not a trip but a voyage, I wholeheartedly agree.

As I have said many times, and as my envoy has stated around the region, I have a completely open mind on how we proceed and where we end up. Australia has no prescriptive view. This is a complex and important matter that needs proper consideration. The clear conclusion from my envoy's report is that there is an interest in the region in this discussion, and there is a wish to explore the possibilities without any fixed or final views on a destination.

There will inevitably be disagreement along the way; this is natural and normal. In fact, it would be abnormal to expect any immediate agreement on such a complex challenge; that is why I have deliberately set a target of an Asia-Pacific community by 2020, comfortably removed from the present, but still sufficiently close to focus our collective mind.

Some of you may ask why Australia has put forward this proposal; the answer is straightforward, we are committed to active middle power diplomacy.

It is in that tradition that I am committed to Australia making a positive contribution to the international policy debate on the future of our wider region. I do not believe we can afford to sit idly by while the region simply evolves without any sense of strategic purpose; in fact, I believe this is potentially dangerous. We do not bring to the table a misty-eyed idealism about some pan-regional utopia, by contrast the Australian government takes a deeply realist approach to security. The realism of the international relations of the 21st Century necessarily involves a high degree of structured regional and global engagement to be effective in our highly globalized world.

Australia is also a strong believer in the importance of military cooperation and military transparency, as contributing to long-term security. That is why Australia is building on our already-strong defense and security relationships around the region; that is why we have recently released Australia's first Defense White Paper in nearly a decade. If sovereign states are clear about their strategic perceptions and their military forces, the risk of miscalculation is reduced.

The article is an excerpt of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's speech before the Eighth IISS (The London based International Institute for strategic studies) Asia Security Summit in Singapore last weekend.

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A paradigm shift in the US global defense strategy

Robert M. Gates , Singapore | Thu, 06/04/2009 12:51 PM | Opinion

In recent years, the nations of Asia have, for the most part, achieved unprecedented wealth and stature as they have forged more mature political, economic, and military institutions.

All of this has demonstrated the correlation between economic prosperity and stability, and the need to ensure that Asia is appropriately represented in the global economic order.

All the while, the strategic landscape of Asia continues to evolve:

New and re-emerging centers of power - from China and Russia, to India and Indonesia - combined with other shifts, give impetus to the search for a new security architecture in the region;

When it comes to freedom, or standards of living, or security, the people of Asia are expecting more from themselves - and from their governments. Civil societies and democratic reforms have taken root, and, with them, we have seen a profound effect on domestic politics and national-security policies;

Military modernization has continued apace - with rising states seeking forces commensurate with their economic power, and smaller states trying to preserve their position in the regional order; and

The emergence of multiple transnational challenges - some new, some old, which I will discuss shortly - calls for greater cooperation between all of our nations.

The challenge for the United States has been to fashion defense policies that adapt to new realities - but do so in a way that preserves and protects our fundamental, and enduring, interests and values on the Pacific Rim, which includes the security and stability of the region as a whole. Consider our relationships with long-standing treaty allies Japan and South Korea - cornerstones of our foreign policy.

We entered into these alliances in the early years of the Cold War when both nations were impoverished and virtually destroyed. The Republic of Korea and Japan have since become economic powerhouses with modern, well-trained and equipped armed forces.

They are more willing and able to take responsibility for their own defense and assume responsibility for collective security beyond their shores.

As a result, we are making adjustments in each country to maintain a posture that is more appropriate to that of a partner, as opposed to a patron. Still, though, a partner fully prepared and able to carry out all - I repeat, all - of our alliance obligations.

At the same time, we are seeing developments with other nations, and other friends. When it comes to India, we have seen a watershed in our relations - cooperation that would have been unthinkable in the recent past.

And we are working with China on common challenges - from economic matters to security issues such as regional areas of tension, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, energy security, piracy, and disaster relief.

It is essential for the United States and China to find opportunities to cooperate wherever possible. This includes

maintaining a defense relationship marked by consistent and open channels of communication and contact. The United States, for its part, will remain committed to this goal.

What we have seen in the US approach to Asia in recent years - and what I believe we will see in the future - is a very real shift that reflects new thinking in US defense strategy overall.

A shift that, while continuing to fulfill our commitments to the permanent presence of, and direct action by, US forces in the region - places ever greater emphasis on building the capacity of partners to better defend themselves.

A shift away from solely conventional military deterrence as traditionally understood - think of mechanized divisions poised along the Korean demilitarized zone or the central plains of Germany.

A shift toward a re-balanced mix of the so-called "hard" and "soft" elements of national power - where military, diplomatic, economic, cultural, and humanitarian elements are integrated seamlessly.

As in the rest of the world, in Asia the traditional dilemmas posed by rising, resurgent, or rogue nation states coexist with a range of diverse, unconventional threats that transcend national borders. Some are ancient - such as piracy, ethnic strife, and poverty.

Others are of more recent vintage: terrorist networks harnessing new technologies; weapons proliferation; environmental degradation; drug and human trafficking; cyber security; climate change; economic turmoil in the global markets; and the emergence of deadly and contagious diseases that can spread more rapidly than ever before in human history.

It has become clear in just the last two decades that "security" encompasses far more than just military considerations. An economic crisis can become a security crisis. A lack of good governance can undermine order and stability.

Under pressure from criminals or disease, weak states can become failed states. What these challenges all have in common is that they simply cannot be overcome by one, or even two countries, no matter how wealthy or powerful.

While the United States has unparalleled capabilities, we also recognize that the best solutions require multiple nations acting with uncommon unity.

I know some in Asia have concluded that Afghanistan does not represent a strategic threat for their countries, owing in part to Afghanistan's geographic location. But the threat from failed or failing states is international in scope - whether in the security, economic, or ideological realms.

Extremists in Asia have engaged in terrorist acts such as in Bali, terrorist activity and guerilla warfare in Mindanao, and they have plotted attacks in several Southeast Asian nations.

They are inspired by, and at times have received support directly from, groups operating along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border - the ungoverned space from which this threat ultimately emanates.

Other developments pose challenges to the long-term stability, security, and peace of Asia. Whether on the sea, in the air, in space, or cyberspace, the global commons represent a realm where we must cooperate - where we must adhere to the rule of law and the other mechanisms that have helped maintain regional peace.

Only by committing to openness and transparency - by adhering to standard operational practices - can we prevent misunderstandings, accidents, and even open conflicts.

The goal of the United States has not changed: Our goal is complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We will not accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state.

North Korea's nuclear program and actions constitute a threat to regional peace and security.

President Obama has offered an open hand to tyrannies that unclench their fists. He is hopeful, but he is not naive.

Likewise, the United States and our allies are open to dialogue, but we will not bend to pressure or provocation.

There are no easy solutions to the challenges I have outlined this morning. This brings me to my final point: the type of leadership you can expect from President Obama and the US in coming years.

The President has spoken of a more collaborative and consultative foreign policy - one committed to forging common solutions to common problems. Do not get me wrong: The United States will continue to be assertive on the international stage.

The article is an excerpt of US Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates' speech before the Eighth IISS (London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies) Asia Security Dialogue in Singapore last weekend.

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Australia, RI strengthen border protection

Lilian Budianto , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Thu, 06/04/2009 12:51 PM | World

Australian and Indonesian top officials discussed border protection measures in Jakarta on Wednesday, following a significant surge in incidents of people smuggling from Indonesia to Australia.

Australian Home Affairs Minister Bob Debus and his delegation, including National Security Adviser Duncan Lewis and People Smuggling Ambassador Michael Potts, met with Indonesian Minister for Justice and Human Rights Andi Mattalatta.

Debus said the Australian government had allocated an additional A\$654 million in its 2009-2010 budget to tackle people smuggling and stabilize displaced populations in the region.

Indonesia has become a hub for economic migrants and refugees from Asia and the Middle East seeking to reach Australia. In April, Indonesian authorities arrested 70 Afghan people bound for Australia without proper documents. The arrest came a day after a rickety boat carrying a group of asylum seekers, allegedly from Afghanistan, exploded off the Northwest coast of Western Australia.

"Our strengthened border security measures will enable us to identify people smugglers, intercept people smuggling ventures and prosecute people smugglers," Debus said in a statement sent to The Jakarta Post.

Human smuggling is defined as the importation of people into a country via the deliberate evasion of immigration laws.

Reuters reported that people-smuggling to Australia peaked in 2001 when more than 1,200 people, mostly from the Middle East, arrived in the country under the arrangements by professional people-smuggling rings. In 2008, Australian authorities caught 162 people trying to enter their country illegally.

An Australian court also sentenced an Indonesian to six years in jail for smuggling three Iranians and nine Afghans into the country last year.

Indonesia helped extradite an Iraqi man arrested in Jakarta last year for allegedly smuggling nearly 900 asylum-seekers, mostly from the Middle East and Asia, to Australia from Indonesia between 1999 and 2001.

"Recent boat arrivals to Australia and other countries in our region demonstrate that we are not immune from the conflicts and insecurity that is driving this global spike," Debus said.

The border protection measure is part of the Lombok Treaty signed between the two countries in 2006 and an agreement on people smuggling, human trafficking and asylum seekers reached at the Bali Process meeting in April, which involved 33 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

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Malaysia repeatedly ignored RI protests over Ambalat

Ary Hermawan , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Fri, 06/05/2009 1:07 PM | National

Indonesia has sent 35 notes of protests to Malaysia over Ambalat since 1980 but they have not stopped the provocation by the neighboring country, the Foreign Ministry said Friday.

The government sent the latest note of protest on Thursday following the recent encroachment by Malaysian vessels into Ambalat areas over which Indonesia claims sovereignty.

"We sent the note of protest to reiterate our claim over Ambalat and to remind them that we need to go back to the discussion table," Teuku Faizasyah, the ministry's spokesperson, told reporters.

Malaysia has denied violating Indonesia's sovereignty, saying Ambalat is a disputed area. The issue has again raised tensions between the two countries whose relations have already been marred by cynicism and stereotypes.

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Calibrating the right role for the military in Asia-Pacific

Juwono Sudarsono , Singapore | Fri, 06/05/2009 1:39 PM | Opinion

We have all been affected by the economic and financial crisis of the past nine months, including the budget for spending and operational readiness of all services of our defense forces.

In turn, the financial-economic crisis influences the evolving security environment, where in Asia-Pacific trans-regional trade, investment, and financial flows occur. It is also impacting on future perceptions of multilateral cooperation.

In this light, I would like to contribute to the framework provided by Prime Minister Rudd and encourage that the Pacific community concept should be based on the clustering of regional cooperation in Northeast Asia, in Southeast Asia, and in the South Pacific.

It is not much different from the defense perimeter defined by Dean Acheson in 1951, when the strategic perimeter of the United States constituted the spectrum of alliances from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia to the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) in the south.

We are now seeing the rise of economic powers in these regions and it is a question of calibrating the right role and presence of military forces in the region, both the extra-regional forces as well as the intra-regional forces.

I must say that the role of the United States has been critical for the past 60 years in providing the security provision of order in the Pacific rim that enabled the rise of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and ASEAN, right down to ANZUS down in the south.

The question is whether this clustering of Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific should be gradually delegated to extra-regional powers or should it be provided to the intra-regional powers?

In our experience in ASEAN, Indonesia in particular has been able to work together with all our fellow members of ASEAN - Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar - to provide the ASEAN security community so that security in a wider sense - political, economic, as well as military - can provide sustainable economic development that ensures prosperity is shared amongst all the countries in the region.

I am also looking at the number of younger people attending the IISS meeting here, including military officers. Most of us here are from the generation that was born in the 1950s, but I see now younger people who transcend the Korean generation, the Vietnam War generation, and the recent crisis all across the region, whether it is Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, or the South Pacific.

I would like to appeal that there should be more cooperation through institutions like the IISS but also institutions of education provided for military officers, be it in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and others, so that intra-regional connections between younger officers from the tri-services - soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines - can connect together and be familiar with their perception of the evolving security dimension in Asia-Pacific.

In later forums, the clustering of these regional forums, whether it is Northeast Asia between China, Japan, and South Korean, or in ASEAN or in the South Pacific, can provide a new picture of the importance of connectivity of political, economic and security issues.

In this light, I would like to appeal for more cooperation to be done between military officers, diplomats, academics, as well as people from business. The security dimension is as important to business as business is to security. As Secretary

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Indonesia not afraid of Malaysia: Minister

Antara , Jakarta | Sat, 06/06/2009 6:52 PM | National

Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono said Saturday Indonesia was not afraid of a series of maneuverings by Malaysia in the disputed maritime territory of Ambalat in the Sulawesi Sea.

"We are undeterred. Let Malaysia send military force and launch propaganda in Ambalat and its surrounding areas. For certain Ambalat belongs to the Unitary State of Republic of Indonesia," Juwono said as quoted by Antara news agency.

He said despite their poor economic and social status, Indonesian citizens living near the border were mature and smart enough to resist all forms of Malaysia's maneuvering and propaganda.

Juwono said Indonesia had awarded concessions to Italian company ENI and US energy giant Chevron to operate in Ambalat since 1966, but Malaysia only began to raise the issue to fore after it released its maritime map in 1979. Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam and China are challenging the legitimacy of the map.

"Revenues from the contracts have gone to the state's coffer. Our position is stronger whatsoever...all is in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea," he said.

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RI, Malaysia to negotiate over Ambalat in August

The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Sat, 06/06/2009 1:22 PM | National

Foreign Ministry said Saturday Indonesia would hold a negotiation with Malaysia over theover the disputed East Kalimantan's Ambalat maritime territory.

Arif Havaz Oegroseno, director for international treaties and legal affairs on political, security and territorial issues at the ministry, said it would the same team that had negotiation with Singapore over border territory.

"We have a strong team," he said as quoted by tempointeraktif.com, underlining that Malaysia had no strong base to claim the disputed area.

Arif said both countries had held 13 negotiation over Ambalat, the last one being in May last year.

Ambalat is a maritime area located off the East Kalimantan coast, over which both Indonesia and Malaysia claim sovereignty

Malaysian warships have recently trespassed into the Indonesian territorial waters surrounding Ambalat several times.

Both countries have been having dispute over the maritime block, believed to be rich in oil and gas, since the 1980s. (dre)

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President, lawmakers meet for Ambalat talk

The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Sat, 06/06/2009 8:28 PM | National

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono held a meeting with members of the House of Representatives' Commission I on defense on Saturday to address the Ambalat crisis.

Deputy chairman of the commission, Yusron Ihza Mahendra, said the meeting was a forum for a dialogue between the executive and legislative powers concerning the territorial dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia.

"I think the Ambalat issue is not about double claims. Ambalat belongs to us and we have to convey this to Malaysia. It's Malaysia that stakes a claim," Yusron said as quoted by tempointeraktif.com news portal before the meeting at the Presidential Office.

Indonesian Military (TNI) chief Gen. Djoko Santoso and Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono were seen attending the meeting, which is still underway.

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Ambalat dispute, a spat between neighbors

Imanuddin Razak , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Sat, 06/06/2009 12:27 PM | Headlines

Witnessing the latest "border spat" between Indonesia and Malaysia over the Ambalat territory, one may immediately question: Is this really necessary? Another question would be: Is the dispute truly happening?

In response to the first question, many - perhaps most - of the both Indonesian and Malaysian citizens, would certainly say the oil-rich territory is worth fighting for.

Why? Because the dispute centers over claims to the ownership of the territory which consists of two blocks with potentially huge oil and gas reserves.

Ambalat is a 15,235 square kilometer maritime area located off the coast of east Kalimantan, which both Indonesia and Malaysia claim to be theirs. Geologist Andang Bachtiar estimates that just one of the Ambalat blocks could hold as much as 764 million barrels of oil and 1.4 trillion cubic feet of gas.

Oil and gas have become very important commodities, especially as the world is in urgent need of energy sources and may face an oil crisis in the not-too-distant future.

Oil has become one of the most important factors in the ups and downs of the global economy. It is also oil which has triggered various conflicts in many parts of the oil-rich Middle East, including in the recently reduced Iraqi conflicts and in Iran.

Unless new sources of energy are discovered, the whole world will have to deal with a serious energy problem, sooner than predicted.

It would thus come as no surprise if Indonesia and Malaysia struggled to secure the Ambalat territory. It would be naive to say that neither country needs new sources of oil, including the reserves in Ambalat, especially since no reliable energy source has been discovered that could replace the world's depleting oil reserves.

The second question is of no less importance in observing all the "awkwardness" surrounding this dispute. Speculations were rife that the Ambalat dispute was merely a cover-up for a political campaign to win the sympathy of the Indonesian public ahead of the upcoming presidential election.

The most recent maritime border breach by a Malaysian warship on June 2 was not the first such breach by our neighboring country. Last year, Malaysia reportedly breached the border on 28 separate occasions. This year alone, Malaysian warships have allegedly trespassed across the border nine times.

Upon observing the frequency of violations of these Malaysian warships, it is surprising the Indonesian side, at least publicly, has not adopted more serious measures to confront Malaysia.

Assuming Indonesian warships are obsolete and have out-of-date equipment, the Indonesian Navy is surely not completely toothless against the Malaysian fleet.

Aside from speculations that the Ambalat dispute has been part of a high-ranking political scenario to win the Indonesian public's sympathy ahead of the July 8 presidential election, should the dispute continue and remain unsettled, won't it only create disharmony, not just between the two neighboring governments, but most importantly among citizens of both countries?

Geopolitics-wise, a prolonged dispute between the two countries would create instability at least within Southeast Asia and could disrupt the unity of ASEAN.

Wasn't it unpleasant enough when we witnessed the sensitive issues surrounding the treatment of the TKI (Indonesian Migrant Workers) in Malaysia, or the recent dispute over patent claims to cultural products such as batik designs and traditional dances?

It is widely feared that the Ambalat issue could add fuel to residual anger and resentment, mainly on the Indonesian side, since Indonesia lost its two islands - Sipadan and Ligitan - to Malaysia after The Hague-based International Court of Justice ruled in favor of Malaysia in December 2002.

A recent trivial wedding and family dispute involving Indonesian model Manohara Odelia Pinot and Kelantan Prince Tengku Muhammad Fakhry of Malaysia saw the emergence of the less well-known Lasykar Merah-Putih (The Red-and-White Paramilitary Unit), which has blatantly supported Manohara.

In the event that the Ambalat dispute continues, or worse expands into conflict, an emergence of angry militias similar to the Lasykar Merah-Putih, would not be inconceivable.

While leaders from Indonesia and Malaysia may be misguided in their policies, they are not necessarily aggressive. Also, they generally do not plan to start wars on the basis of cold-blooded calculations, but they may blunder into one if they lose control of the situation.

The last scenario, I am 100 percent certain, is not expected by either Indonesia and Malaysia. Thus, it is advisable, especially for Malaysia, not to provoke the border dispute into a dangerous war game by stopping the "border breaches" of its warships.

In the mean time, Malaysia and Indonesia should go back to the diplomatic table to settle the dispute. Or, if diplomatic channels fail, there is another elegant mechanism of dispute settlement - through a "battle in court".

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Government should not 'underrate' Ambalat issue

Erwida Maulia , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Mon, 06/08/2009 9:38 AM | National

Observers support the diplomatic channel taken by the government to settle the dispute on Ambalat waters while at the same time urging the government to warn Malaysia over its provocative measures.

International relations expert from the University of Indonesia, Hikmahanto Juwono, said the maritime boundary issue should be handled separately from the "provocative maneuvers" of Malaysian warships in Ambalat.

He said Indonesia should firmly warn Malaysia that its provocative actions in Ambalat could be against the ASEAN Charter, signed by both Indonesia and Malaysia.

The charter stipulates that member countries should not settle their boundary disputes through violent means.

Hikmahanto criticized the government for merely sending a diplomatic note and approving lawmakers' departing for Malaysia to settle the dispute.

"It is the government itself that should speak firmly to the Malaysian government over the case," he told The Jakarta Post on Sunday.

He was commenting on a four-day visit to Malaysia by six lawmakers of the House of Representatives' Commission I, overseeing defense and foreign affairs.

Led by commission chairman Theo L. Sambuaga, the lawmakers will leave Monday to meet their counterparts.

The Malaysian lawmakers are then expected to help convince their government to cease its warship maneuvers in Ambalat.

"The provocative actions will worsen relations between the two countries, which we don't want," Theo said after meeting President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, as quoted by presidensby.info.

Five other lawmakers are Yusron Ihza Mahendra, Djoko Susilo, Hedi Bone Zulkarnaen, Shidqi Wahab and Andreas Pairera.

While supporting diplomatic measures, a political expert from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), Ikrar Nusa Bakti, warned that Indonesia should monitor the Ambalat territory.

"I am supportive of deploying Indonesian warships to Ambalat.

"We must learn from the Sipadan-Ligitan case and should not underestimate the Ambalat issue by saying there is only a small chance the dispute will be brought to the International Court of Justice."

Foreign Affairs Ministry's spokesman Teuku Faizasyah said Sunday that the ministry had dispatched a diplomatic note concerning the dispute to the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

He said the note "firmly protests [Malaysian warships' maneuvers in Ambalat] and reaffirms Indonesia's rights of sovereignty".

Faizasyah said both countries had met 13 times since 2005 to settle their maritime boundary issues.

"We are expecting another meeting immediately."

The ministry's director general for international law and agreement, Arif Havas Oegroseno, said that the border negotiation process was highly complicated and "much more difficult than forming political parties".

"There are dozens of elements, for example law, geography, geology, hydrography, oceanography, tide calculations, cartography, mapmaking and jurisprudence, which have to be factored in," he told the Post.

"They all have to be addressed. And to not address them all for the sake of quick negotiation is a rather unintelligent decision."

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We need to have rules of engagement to prevent a conflict'

Juwono Sudarsono | Mon, 06/08/2009 11:09 AM | Headlines

Tensions have again flared in the oil-rich Ambalat waters off East Kalimantan, which are claimed by both Malaysia and Indonesia. The Indonesian public accused the government of being too passive in settling the border dispute, especially with the Malaysian Navy's ships often straying into Indonesian territory. The Indonesian Navy reacted by chasing the intruding ships away and ordering them to leave the area immediately. Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono discussed with The Jakarta Post's Novan Iman Santosa and Kili Pringgogidgo what the government is doing to settle the border dispute. The following are excerpts:

Question: *The government is considered as being passive in settling the Ambalat dispute. What has the Defense Ministry done to settle the dispute?*

Answer: It is untrue the government is being passive. We must strongly emphasize that this dispute arose from two claims based on two different laws.

We claim the Ambalat area based on our law, while Malaysia claims it based on the 1979 Maritime Chart and on their law.

The dispute must be settled through negotiation.

The Foreign Affairs Ministry has been very active, having instigated 12 meetings at the director-general level since 2005.

So it is not fair to say the government is being passive. It is key for us to resolve the legal dispute peacefully through negotiations.

The intrusion and violations of territorial borders are done by both sides, not only by Malaysia according to our law, but also by Indonesia according to Malaysian law.

Malaysia and Indonesia's interpretation of where their territorial waters lie is different.

The Foreign Ministry is actively fighting for our interpretation, that Ambalat is legally under our sovereignty.

Are there also meetings between defense ministries in addition to between foreign ministries?

We will discuss this matter at the annual General Border Committee (GBC) meeting.

In 2007, then Malaysian Defense Minister Najib Razak, now Prime Minister, regretted the problems related to the disagreement between both navies. That was in March 2007.

I could accept that. It was not an apology, but he expressed regret about the inappropriate conduct on the Malaysian side, of the Maritime Police and Navy. Since then, we agreed on rules of engagement to prevent wars at sea.

We are setting some terms that are being carried out by our navy there, to persuade the Malaysian Maritime Police and

Navy to get out of the area we claim as our territory.

So there is an overlapping area?

Especially relating to sovereign rights. Because of the overlapping, it has become a dispute as we use different laws.

The 1979 map, outlining the Malaysian territory, is being challenged by Brunei, Singapore, the United Kingdom, China and Vietnam.

I hope the issue will not be blown up as an infringement of territory because this is an unsettled legal dispute.

It is still ongoing, and foreign ministries from both countries are trying to settle it using international law.

Disputes over territorial borders have to be resolved through law, through negotiation.

That's what we are doing.

At the same time, oil and gas exploration activities are still being conducted by companies based on licenses handed out by Indonesian authorities.

What about exploration in the area also claimed by Malaysia as its rightful territory?

So far, there has been no input about that. But I have checked with the energy and mineral resources and foreign ministries. All exploration in the area is conducted through permits granted by the Indonesian government.

Will the Foreign Ministry's diplomacy lead to the case being taken to the International Court of Justice, like the Sipadan and Ligitan Islands case?

So far, there are no hints we are heading in that direction. It will depend on the Foreign Minister and the directorate general of international law and treaty staff.

But most importantly, the Defense Ministry and the Indonesian Military **TNI** headquarters are not standing idle.

We are not giving in, but the dispute is on claims of sovereignty and rights of sovereignty still have to be resolved through negotiations.

What if Malaysia tries to stall the negotiations?

Well, I think that's where the role of the military and police comes in, to enhance negotiations between our Foreign Ministry and the Malaysian Foreign Ministry.

We still have to safeguard our sovereignty or claims of sovereignty by deploying our patrol **ships**.

At the same time, we have to also realize the Malaysian side will act in a similar way.

That's why we need to have rules of engagement to prevent the tension from becoming a conflict.

What if Malaysia feels it needs to increase its presence by sending four or five more ships as we are deploying six warships in the area?

I think it will depend on which agency they are deploying. If they deploy the Marine Police under the Home Affairs Ministry, it will be part of their claim conducted by the police.

We are deploying the Navy because it is important to have a presence there while the dispute is being resolved. Real forms of sovereignty have to be presented.

All we have to do is just calculate the costs.

What is the appropriate budget to allow this presence to declare our claim, based on our law.

What if it becomes a protracted issue, can we afford a long dispute?

For that, we will pay whatever the cost is, because it is important to maintain our bargaining power.

Legally, I believe we are stronger because the Malaysian territorial claim is challenged by six other countries.

We have stronger historical and legal bases, although there is a clause in UNCLOS stating disputed baselines should be settled through negotiations.

In matters where the baseline is still disputed, that's where the Foreign Ministry comes in. We have a strong case in this respect.

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UN Palestine committee to convene in Jakarta

Ary Hermawan , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Mon, 06/08/2009 11:10 AM | World

Just a few days after US President Barack Obama pledged to speed up the peace process in the Middle East, the United Nations committee for the rights of the Palestinians will convene in Jakarta from June 8-10 to reinforce international support for a two-state solution to the decades-old Arab-Israeli conflict.

The committee, established in 1975, has 22 member nations, including Cuba, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

The international meeting will be divided into two sessions: the UN Asia and Pacific Meeting on the Question of Palestine and the UN Public Forum in Support of the Palestinian People.

"The objective of both meetings is to encourage broad international action, including by Asian and Pacific States and societies, in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace and for achieving a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict," the UN said in a statement sent to The Jakarta Post on Friday.

The meetings will be held as Muslims around the globe welcome the US' fresh support for the Palestinians and saw positive signs from Israel that the Jewish nation will finally recognize a Palestinian state.

"The latest developments in the Middle East are quite promising," Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly's Hidayat Nurwahid said Friday. He is also the deputy chairman of the al-Quds Foundation, an international organization that works to support of the Palestinian cause.

"I think America now wants a fair solution *for both parties*," he said.

The US has announced its strong opposition to the construction of new Jewish settlements in the West Bank and has decided to postpone the moving its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which Hidayat said would pave the way for the creation of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Noted Muslim scholar Azyumardi Azra said as the US policy on the Middle East shifts it is now the best time for the international community, especially Asia-Pacific countries, to push the region's peace process forward.

"The Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be settled by Arab countries. A third party is needed," he said.

He said he hoped the UN meetings in Jakarta would come up with breakthrough solutions to deal with the Palestinian issue.

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Govt sticks to diplomacy in Ambalat issue

The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Tue, 06/09/2009 10:48 AM | National

Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono says the Indonesian and Malaysian governments are still committed to diplomacy to resolve their territorial dispute over the Ambalat maritime area off East Kalimantan.

"We are still in talks with the Malaysian authorities through our Foreign Ministry regarding differences we have on the maritime borders," he said Monday after a hearing with the House of Representatives' Commission I on defense and foreign affairs.

"It's very important for both sides to stop provoking one another. I also want the people and the press to stay calm; let's not escalate anything."

The Ambalat maritime area has been claimed by both Indonesia and Malaysia as part of their respective territories.

The dispute over the maritime block, believed to be rich in oil and gas, has been a source of tension between Indonesia and Malaysia since the 1980s.

Both governments have met several times to try to negotiate a peaceful solution to the issue, and have declared the block as status quo until agreement could be reached.

Recently, Indonesia accused Malaysian battleships of entering Indonesian territorial waters surrounding Ambalat.

According to the Indonesian Military (TNI), this was Malaysia's ninth such incursion into the area this year.

However, Malaysian authorities countered back by accusing Indonesia of breaching its borders 13 times.

House Commission I member Yusron Ihza Mahendra said the House's patience in dealing with Malaysia's "continued provocation" in Ambalat was beginning to run out.

Yusron added Indonesia must no longer use the "context of discussions" when it came to declaring its stance on the Ambalat issue with the Malaysian authorities.

"The word 'discussion' means we agree to bargain with Malaysia on maritime borders and limits," he said.

"In my view, we no longer need any discussion because we have a solid legal basis for our claim to Ambalat. What we need to do is to show Malaysia we have a firm stance on Ambalat.

"For a start, we can recall our ambassador in Malaysia to show a firm political stance. We can also give official warnings to Malaysia, and if all measures fail, then we'll have no choice but to 'declare war'," he added. Yusron said five Commission I members would go to Malaysia to meet with its defense minister and parliament speaker.

"We want to tell them to stop the provocations," he said. "It will only make own people more restless."

TNI chief Gen. Djoko Santoso said the army would stick by orders from the civilian authorities.

"So far, the government has maintained its stance of using diplomacy 'to resolve the issue', and we will respect that,"

he said. (hdt)

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The Jakarta Post

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Bridging the West and the Muslim world

Laura Schuurmans , Jakarta | Wed, 06/10/2009 1:02 PM | Opinion

After successfully addressing the Muslim World in Egypt last Thursday, US President Obama has sought a new beginning to relations between the West and the Muslim World. While his speech was generally welcomed, many Muslims remain sceptical about Obama's words, as actually enacting a solution to today's political disputes is of far greater importance.

Although President Obama has renewed talks in the Middle East, many in the Islamic world claim, however, that as long as there is no solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict, the US is unlikely to win over the hearts and the minds of the Muslim world. The ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have also contributed to the growing gap.

While in the West Islam is often associated with the Middle East, The Muslim world in fact stretches beyond the Arab World far into Asia. The world's largest Muslim population is in Indonesia, a place where people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds have lived a relatively peacefully co-existence throughout history.

In Indonesia, one cannot deny that there has been a tendency toward a more radical interpretation of Islam and after the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, or that religious parties have gradually been gaining a stronger grip on its political system. Tension between Muslims and Christians has occasionally resulted in violent clashes. However, the country has always upheld its values of secularism, tolerance and pluralism.

Indonesia's cultural norms and values do not include honor killings or blood revenge, and women have enjoyed political freedom and equal rights throughout the modern era. Across the archipelago girls go to school. Illiteracy among females is a rare phenomenon and women have the liberty to rise to the highest echelons in both the government and private sectors.

With this backdrop, Indonesia can and should play a much larger role to bridging the gap and changing the negative perception people in the West may have of Islam. In order to present a non-Arab face of Islam, Indonesia needs to move to the forefront of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, an initiative of the UN secretary-general which seeks to reduce tensions across cultural divides that threaten to inflame existing political conflicts or trigger new ones.

Although President Obama has rightfully put strengthening ties between the West and the Muslim world at the top of his agenda, many debate whether or not he made the right decision to address the Muslim world from Egypt instead of Turkey or Indonesia.

During the Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Istanbul in April 2009, which is the premier global event to bridging the gap between the West and the Muslim world, leaders of both worlds came

together. Although President Obama initially confirmed his attendance for the second day of the forum, he regretfully missed out on a unique opportunity to address both worlds during the forum, which was held in a secular and modern Muslim State located at the intersection of East and West.

As President Obama has been working hard to ease tensions, across the Atlantic in The Netherlands, Dutch opposition leader Geert Wilders continues to exploit Islam and induce hatred in a western audience who often have no idea what the true essence of Islam really is. As though Fitna wasn't enough to falsely portray Islam as a brutal religion, it appears that Fitna II is now on the way.

To undermine any efforts the Dutch government has made to strengthen relations between the two worlds, Wilders recently demanded the resignation of Nikolaos van Dam after he gave a lecture on cultural aspects in the Muslim world. Van Dam is the Netherlands' heavyweight Ambassador to Indonesia; he is fluent in Arabic and an expert on the Islamic world from whom many, including Muslim scholars, could learn from.

In last week's EU elections, Wilders anti-Islam party won four seats in the European Parliament and is now the second largest political party in the Netherlands.

Nevertheless, to build long lasting and solid ties between the West and the Muslim world, a solution on various international issues, such as Palestine, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kashmir is essential to change the negative perception the Muslim World has of the West. This, however, is not enough. To decrease tension and to eradicate the danger of religious extremism, one should press for a two-state solution to the Middle East conflict.

As Obama's speech is strong evidence of the US president's goodwill to improve his country's relationship with the Muslim world, the world, including Muslims, expect much more concrete action from Obama to overcome the above conflicts.

The writer is a freelance writer based in Jakarta. She participated in the UN Alliance of Civilizations Forum held in Istanbul in 2009.

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Between science, diplomacy and Ambalat dispute

Bantarto Bandoro , JAKARTA | Mon, 06/15/2009 11:11 AM | Opinion

A couple of weeks ago our presidential hopefuls gave their perspectives on the Ambalat case. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said Indonesia would not compromise its sovereignty in the disputed Ambalat waters.

Jusuf Kalla said Indonesia must take action and be prepared to wage war over border breaches in the disputed waters.

Megawati was not so much worried about any possible war between the two countries, but more the possibility that Malaysian military allies would besiege Indonesia, should Malaysia enforce its will regarding Ambalat.

The prolonged tension is sure to drag elements from both countries to assure that their respective national interests are not in danger and are protected. The decision of our legislative members to meet officials in Kuala Lumpur reflects such sentiments, though many doubt if this move will result in a change in Kuala Lumpur's policy.

The 15,235-sq-km Ambalat region is believed to be rich in oil and gas reserves that could be exploited for approximately 30 years. Both countries have claimed the Ambalat block near their common border, off the eastern coast of Kalimantan, is their own. Indonesia and Malaysia have something in common, namely sovereignty, development and friendship.

Both countries understand the oil and gas reserve in question is strategically important for their future economic development. ASEAN's reputation as a "club of friendly countries" will be compromised should the two countries enforce their will over Ambalat.

The dispute will not end anytime soon; the next administration will have to deal with the problem. Perhaps it would be worth for the next government to conduct scientific research in the area to see if it is strategically and economically beneficial enough for Indonesia to fight for. This would mean the government would have to increase its scientific research spending.

Whoever our next president is, they must remember that science and technology have tremendous applications for, and effects on, the country's foreign policy. Given Indonesia's vast geographical area, innovation in its approach to regional affairs and to some extent in technology – Indonesia is home to winner of Science Olympics – countries in Southeast Asia may want to cooperate and benefit from the country's ideas and products.

Our government does not seem to have taken full advantage of the potential of science to improve foreign affairs and ensure healthier regional strategic milieu. Indeed, science is often seen as being far removed from diplomacy. The dispute over Ambalat has the potential to erupt into full blown conflict, but the need for scientific research, whatever the outcome, would require mutual cooperation. This point has been overlooked.

Scientific cooperation and engagement in the disputed area, of scientific diplomacy, should be conducted with the explicit intent of fostering a positive relationship with the Malaysian government. However, such engagement should not be undertaken at the expense of respective sovereignty. To ensure this, the government must do the following:

First, think strategically. Scientific cooperation could be a fruitful way to engage Malaysia at the time when diplomatic relations are the subject of waves of protest here. Scientists from Indonesia and Malaysia could work together on issues of mutual interests and discuss potential areas of cooperation, surrounding Ambalat of course, outside the realm of politics.

Second, think defensively as well as offensively. Indonesian's current standpoint that Ambalat is legally within its jurisdiction is firm. This standpoint, however, should not prevent the two countries from having access to each other's respective technologies in order to better develop the potentials of the Ambalat.

But such a defensive policy should be matched with better offensive policies, namely by attracting Malaysia's best and brightest scientists to Indonesia, and in turn sending Indonesian scientists to Malaysia to ensure they better understand our interests, particularly with regard to the issue of Ambalat.

Third, think about people and not just the government. The initiative of our legislative members to visit Malaysian policy makers, as a form of protest, is positive in its essence. This public diplomacy opportunity reminded Malaysia of Indonesia's position on the issue. This highlighted the constructive partnership between Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, a friendship which so far has been the underlying spirit of ASEAN cooperation.

We are not sure when and how the Ambalat case will be resolved. The government in Jakarta may face even more complex challenges regarding the issue and it therefore can no longer overlook such a useful instrument of statecraft.

Now is the time for the government in Jakarta to take advantage of scientific diplomacy by mobilizing the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Defense and other technical departments and agencies such as LIPI (Indonesian Institute of Sciences).

The incoming administration should start considering the possibilities of scientific diplomacy, not just for Ambalat. It could become one of the strongest arrows in our foreign policy quiver. A key to success will definitely be the spirit of the engagement between Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur.

The writer is the chairman of the Indonesian Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and a lecturer of International Relations at the University of Indonesia.

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Issues: 'Ready for war?'

Tue, 06/16/2009 1:26 PM | Reader's Forum



JP/J.Adiguna

Members of the Betawi Brotherhood Forum (FBR) rally Tuesday in front of the Malaysian Embassy in Jakarta to protest Malaysia trespassing the Indonesian border in Ambalat waters. Participants at the rally, which included several Muslim youth groups, said they were ready to wage war against Malaysia over Ambalat.

Your comments:

What about a cyber war as an appetizer? Bilateral diplomatic talks should be the first, and whoever falters must be judged fairly. I disagree with some bombastic media as well, yet I agree the power of media, including the Internet, does help control the seemingly unlimited authority of the politicians and the government in settling local issues brought into international disputes, like a war!

Haven't we had enough war films to wake us up to the importance of peace? Think about it.

Teguh S.

It seems every generation needs to learn the hard way that war will solve nothing, impoverishes the populations of both countries and always gets out of hand. It has many unintended and unforeseen consequences and serves no one in the end.

It is a fact of life that there are always two sides to a story - it's time to find out more of the other side of this story.

Let some respected international council or body hear the stories of both sides and help resolve this mess. Let's not forget we have the Indonesian presidential election soon and some fire might be started from this.

I am neither Indonesian nor Malaysian, but I have lived in both countries.

In my opinion; Indonesians and Malaysians have more in common than otherwise; both countries have deep-seated and wrong views about the people in the other countries, e.g. all Malaysians are arrogant, which are not true; you are both brothers in Islam and as the ruling elites of both countries are Muslim, they had better remember that.

Also, if war is declared, then lots of Indonesian temporary workers in Malaysia will be sent home; trade and business will be badly affected, causing problems for people in both countries; there will also be other unforeseen consequences that will cause suffering.

Please keep talking and get some outside body to help. Please keep cool heads, especially as we have a global financial crisis - war costs money, in all ways. I would hate to see my two favorite countries at war with each other.

A. Watson

It is true Malaysia has a few more warships and planes than Indonesia. But this military advantage is not the only factor that will ensure your victory in war. If it is, we would have different story-endings with the Vietnam war, Iraq war, or even Indonesian independence war.

Indonesia has more years of war experience compared to these two countries. Real war, real enemies, real happenings - not just military training.

It seems you were also not aware of the fact that some military personnel from these two neighboring countries had their military training in the Indonesian jungles with much heavier military standards of discipline than those known by Western military experts.

If war really breaks out, it will be in Kuala Lumpur, not on Indonesian soil, and Indonesians do not need to rely much on their warships and planes to do that.

Jan De Bont

In my opinion, it is in Malaysia's national interest to have good relations with Indonesia, but it seems Malaysia tends to look down on Indonesia.

We need to remind Malaysia that you are not dealing with a desperate society that needs "a divine intervention" to help theirs, you are dealing with one of the largest nations on Earth with one of the most dynamic societies, which, despite the hardship, crisis and all the bad luck, is still able to reform itself and move toward progress.

Indonesia is not perfect, but surely deserves some respect from Malaysia. Enough said.

Edet

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RI questions Israel's 'sincerity' in endorsing Palestinian state

Ary Hermawan , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Tue, 06/16/2009 11:19 AM | Headlines

Indonesia said Monday the major "peace" speech made by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in which he conditionally endorsed the creation of a Palestinian state, "lacked clear direction", and questioned if the about-face was "sincere".

Reversing the stance he had held for decades before assuming office, Netanyahu said Sunday for the first-time that Israel would endorse a Palestinian state, but on conditions the future Palestinian state would not have an army and would recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

"The Palestinians have the right to fight against oppression by any means, including the use of weapons," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Teuku Faizasyah said.

Indonesia, he said, also questioned the implications of Israel's request that Palestinians recognize the Jewishness of Israel.

"Does it mean the Palestinian refugees will be denied their rights to return to their homeland and non-Jewish people will not be allowed to live in Israel?"

The Palestinian authorities slammed Netanyahu's speech as "racist" and rejected his idea of an independent Palestinian state without an army. The US, the key player in the Middle East quartet, praised the speech, calling Israel's backing for a Palestinian state a step "in the right direction". The EU gave it a "cautious welcome".

Indonesia, a Dutch colony for decades before gaining independence in 1945, has consistently supported the Palestinians in their struggle against Israeli occupation. It demands a two-state solution for the conflict based on borders prior to the 1967 Middle East war, thus rejecting Netanyahu's renewed insistence Jerusalem will be Israel's undivided capital.

While hosting the UN meeting on Palestine last week, Indonesia called on the international community to push Israel to end its occupation of Palestine and punish the Jewish nation for its alleged war crimes against unarmed civilians.

Hamdan Basyar, a lecturer at the University of Indonesia's Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, doubted Israel's peace rhetoric, saying, "They agree to endorse a Palestinian state, but they also want to have it under their control".

The speech, he argued, was nothing but a compromise Netanyahu had to make as he was now

facing two-way pressure: one from the hardliners inside his right-leaning coalition government and the other from the United States, once Israel's strongest backer before US President Barack Obama took office and bid to mend the US image after eight years of George Bush's reckless foreign policy.

Obama has welcomed the speech, saying he is committed to a two-state solution and would work with all parties to see the Israeli and Palestinian authorities fulfill their obligations and head toward regional peace.

Hamdan said Obama should not be so easily satisfied by Netanyahu's speech, which overlooked the main issues, such as the freezing of settlement expansion in the West Bank, which has undermined peace process and creation of a Palestinian state.

"Obama must not let Israel go forward with their agenda. A Palestinian state without a military power to defend itself is useless."

A senior politician from the Muslim-based National Mandate Party (PAN), Abdillah Toha, slammed Netanyahu's speech, saying "it is not a speech of peace".

The Israeli leader, he said, had instead "slammed the door to peace" by rejecting the conditions deemed essential to achieving a two-state solution. "The speech's substance is basically against Obama's two-state solution."

The US is seen as the only political power capable of forcing Israel to press the Middle East peace process forward.

"But then Obama has to face challenges in his own country on the issue. We know how strong the Jewish lobby in the US is," Abdillah said.

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Gun boat diplomacy and the Ambalat stand-off

Ferry Akbar Pasaribu , Jakarta | Wed, 06/17/2009 9:23 AM | Opinion

If we scrutinize the dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia over Ambalat, several important facts come to light. First, the gentlemen's agreement between Indonesia and Malaysia to resolve the dispute through negotiations has failed to restrain Malaysia from provoking tensions.

In the first four months of 2009 alone, TNI recorded 14 breaches of Indonesian territory in Ambalat by Malaysia. In 2008 there were 23 such intrusions and 76 in 2007, not including several aerial incursions by Malaysian aircraft.

Second, regardless of the fact that TNI has deployed warships and reconnaissance flights in the area, not to mention its establishment of outposts on Sebatik island, Malaysia seems undeterred from breaching Indonesian territory.

Third, the spirit of the ASEAN brotherhood, which has functioned as the unifier of the region, has not prevented Malaysia from provoking Indonesia.

Malaysian incursions into Ambalat, in my opinion, have so far given Malaysia a better bargaining position vis a vis Indonesia. Even though Malaysia started the provocation by regularly sending its war vessels into Ambalat, which Indonesia claims as its sovereign zone, it was Indonesia who took the initiative to defuse the stand-off – not the other way around.

On June 8, 2009, Indonesia even sent representatives to Kuala Lumpur to discuss the stand-off with their counterparts and other concerned stakeholders.

Indonesian legislators reaffirmed Indonesia's claim to Ambalat waters while at the same time urging Malaysia to continue negotiations. Furthermore, Malaysia's provocation has managed to divide public opinion in Indonesia.

There are some who want Indonesia to take stern action against Malaysia and have accused the government of being too lenient with its neighbor, while others say that Indonesia needs to restrain itself for the sake of good neighborly relations and regional stability.

At the moment, Malaysia seems to welcome Indonesia's initiative to reduce tensions following the recent Ambalat stand off.

On June 10, 2009, when meeting with the Indonesian legislators, the Chief of Staff of the Malaysian Navy apologized for unintentionally breaching Indonesian territory and promised not to

repeat such incursions.

On the same day, although this was two days after Indonesian legislators' arrived in Kuala Lumpur, the chief of the Malaysian armed forces flew to Jakarta to meet the Indonesian defense minister and chief of TNI in Jakarta.

Malaysia agreed to curb its patrols in the area with the goal of avoiding sovereign Indonesian zones.

Both ministries of foreign affairs are also set to resume the 14th round of negotiations in Kuala Lumpur in July.

But this is not the end of the story. In April 2005, Indonesian navy vessel KRI Tedong Naga collided with Malaysia's KDM Rencong in Ambalat.

The incident caused nationwide hysteria and inflamed anti-Malaysian sentiment. Indonesia lodged a complaint with the Malaysian government, leading Malaysia to agree to cool down.

Both sides eventually agreed to resolve the dispute through bilateral negotiations. Unfortunately, Malaysia continued to repeat the incursions on a regular basis until May 2009, when the Indonesian public again became enraged.

Sending its warships to the area more than one hundred times within the four years that negotiations were in process is a clear indication that Malaysia seeks to pursue other means to settle the dispute.

The repeated incursions (since 2005) as the two countries sat at the negotiation table were not isolated or unrelated incidents. It is quite difficult not to conclude that these incursions were deliberately intended to coincide with the negotiation process. This gun-boat diplomatic strategy sought to use the armed forces to bolster its negotiating power.

This subtle intimidation was again present at the meeting between the chief of staff of the Malaysian Navy and the Indonesian legislators.

While he indeed openly apologized in front of the Indonesian legislators, he did not fail to mention that Malaysia would not deploy its state-of-the-art Scorpene-class attack submarine to the area.

The message was clear: the Malaysian Navy has a modern fleet that it can deploy it anytime and that the TNI might not be a match for.

The fact that the TNI flotilla deployed in the area has yet to take stronger action to deter Malaysian vessels from entering Ambalat might further explain why Malaysia is determined to pursue this strategy of gun boat diplomacy. The widely, publicly known condition of the Indonesian navy and air force only makes things worse.

The other thing that needs serious consideration is the position of ASEAN within the context of Indonesian national interests. Since its foundation in 1967, Indonesia has always made ASEAN its first foreign policy priority.

However ASEAN comes second for Malaysia, which puts its national interests first when it comes to issues of territorial sovereignty. Before Ambalat, Malaysia took a similar position on the Sipadan and Ligitan Islands, taking the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), against Indonesia's proposal to deal with the problem at the ASEAN level.

The resulting loss of territory was disastrous for Indonesia. This should not be forgotten now Indonesia has to choose either to protect its national interests or uphold the ASEAN brotherhood.

As the largest country in the region Indonesia has always pursued diplomacy to address disputes; it does not deserve to be treated like this.

Although we are committed to this principle and keen to uphold the spirit of brotherhood in the region, we should not hesitate when it comes to protecting our national interests.

Indonesia therefore needs to modernize its Navy and Air Force with the goal of protecting its archipelago. The concerned stakeholders should be fully authorized to design comprehensive standard operating procedures for facing such crises. Strong measures, including opening fire at intruders in the case that warning signs are disregarded, must be included. Only then will we be able to effectively deter those who try to mess with us.

The author is an Indonesian diplomat. This is his personal opinion.

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20 countries join peacekeeping training

Yuli Tri Suwarni , The Jakarta Post , Bandung | Wed, 06/17/2009 11:15 AM | National



Drilling home the message of peace: Mongolian peacekeeping forces march onto a field in Cipatat, Bandung, West Java, during a joint exercise with more than 550 additional soldiers from 20 countries, including the US and Australia. The two-week training exercise is fully sponsored by the US government.
JP/Yuli Tri Suwarni

More than 500 soldiers from 20 countries, including the US, Australia, Germany and Italy, are taking part in a US-sponsored two-week peacekeeping training – Garuda Shield-09 – in the Army Infantry Training Center in Cipatat, to prepare troops to support UN peacekeeping missions.

The joint training, which was officially opened by chief commander of the Indonesian Military (TNI) Gen. Djoko Santoso, involved Army soldiers armed with rifles and will run until June 29.

Also attending the opening ceremony was Maj. Gen. Vern T. Miyagi, assistant to the commander of US Pacific Asia Command (USPACOM). Djoko said in his address to the opening ceremony that it was an honor and pleasure for Indonesia to win the confidence of participating countries to host the joint training, as well as to win international support for the country's participation in working toward world peace.

Indonesia's efforts are in accordance with its contribution to world peace through the UN peacekeeping mission.

He stressed that joining the UN peacekeeping operation was a must for all countries due to changing strategic relationships as a result of border disputes and energy, economic and climate change crises.

"We have to create cooperative strategies to tackle these crises by creating a standard practice in peacekeeping operations," he said.

Miyagi thanked Indonesia for its readiness to host the training and selected the country because it has long since taken part in UN peacekeeping operations in many countries, including Congo, Lebanon and Cambodia.

He said the US government has been involved in the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) since the G8 Summit held in 2004.

"Indonesia, along with Cambodia, Mongolia, and 31 other Asia Pacific countries, are able to give proper training on peacekeeping operations due to their experiences in such operation," he said.

The Garuda Shield-09 joint military training is divided in two activities: Post Exercise (CPX) and Field Training Exercise (FTX). The exercises are aimed to support peacekeeping and peace support operations by Asia Pacific countries where UN troops are stationed.

Mongolia hosted the first joint military training, code name Khan Quest 07 in 2007. Bangladesh hosted the second training, code named Santi Dhoot-2, in 2008.

The training exercises include technical and tactical military procedures such as checkpoint operations, patrolling and search and disarmament. The soldiers are also trained in humanitarian assistance.

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The Jakarta Post

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RI flexes diplomatic muscle to quell sovereignty pressure: FM

Lilian Budianto , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Wed, 06/17/2009 10:58 AM | World



Keynote speaker:

Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda gives the keynote speech during an annual lecture in commemoration of Mohamad Roem, a prominent Indonesian diplomatic figure, themed "Islam and Democracy in Building Indonesia" at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta on Tuesday. JP/J. Adiguna

Indonesia's diplomacy has contributed to the way big powers recognize independence and perceive Muslims and democracy worldwide, Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda said Tuesday.

Indonesia declared independence from Japanese rule in 1945, following Japan's defeat in World War II. International powers, including the Dutch, defied the declaration, igniting more armed assaults and pushing the young nation to negotiate its sovereignty deals in an unfavorable position.

"The challenge at that time was that the United Nations charter did not recognize independence as a right ... self-determination [as stated in the charter] is defined as self-rule, autonomy, but not independence," said Hassan during an annual lecture at the Islamic State University of Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta.

The lecture was organized in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry to commemorate the centennial of late former foreign minister Mohamad Roem, who was born on May 16, 1908. Roem served in a number of Cabinets under the first president Sukarno, including as foreign minister from 1950 to 1951. He was sent to jail under the Dutch rule and Soekarno presidency for his political activities.

Roem led the Indonesian delegation in talks known as the Roem-Rooyen negotiations in 1949, which paved the way for the Round Table Conference in the same year that led to the Dutch recognition of the sovereignty of Indonesia.

Hassan said it took the international community some 22 years to change the prevailing view that independence was a right.

Therefore at that time the diplomatic battles were not against the Dutch, "but against the prevailing international order," he said. "Independence is not a gift bestowed by colonizers. It is a right for every country worldwide."

Despite being a new nation, Hassan said, Indonesia had won praise for bringing a new recognition that had added weight to the growing demands for sovereignty from the colonized nations of Asia and Africa.

Besides Indonesia, the newly independent countries of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar also pressed forward with similar concerns under the Asia Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955, which led to the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The 15th NAM will be held next month in Egypt.

"Diplomacy has brought us the leverage we are enjoying now. We boast the world's largest Muslim population ... we are praised for spearheading democracy, moderate Islam, pluralism and gender equality in Asia and worldwide," he said.

Despite being home to the largest Muslim population, Indonesia's policies have tended toward nationalistic values and the rights of minorities are enshrined in the Constitution. Although once feared as a breeding ground for terrorism, Washington now touts the country as a model where Islam and democracy can prevail at the same time.

Hassan said Indonesia would continue to make diplomacy the vanguard of its foreign policies, highlighting a standoff with neighboring countries in regards to border, migrant and rights issues.

Indonesia and Malaysia have been facing tension on border issues since the 1980s over oil-rich waters off East Kalimantan, as both countries claim the ownership of the 15,235-square-meter block.

Indonesia has said that it would not bring the dispute to the international tribunal and would exhaust diplomacy to win over the waters.

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Opinion

Tak Bai's shadow over Thailand's image

Published on June 1, 2009

Ref: Hard Line Lingers on the Deep South, May 31.

Your editorial on Tak Bai and the South comes at a timely moment, when attention is focused on Thailand as the Asean chair in its response to Burma's treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi and her fellow political prisoners.

People will have their own opinions about the Tak Bai verdict, which they cannot necessarily express, but both the incident itself and the court's decision give a clear indication of how things really work in this country, with obvious repercussions on its international image and moral standing.

CITIZEN JANE

BANGKOK

What does conscience tell us about the South?

The official post-mortem panel has cleared the police and soldiers involved in the Tak Bai tragedy of all charges, presumably including manslaughter. It found that they acted in accordance with the law, used sound judgement and did their best given the circumstances.

Yet, 78 persons suffocated while in their "care". Given that the vast majority of the survivors were freed, it is likely that the vast majority of those killed were innocent, also.

If I, a civilian, accidentally run over and kill innocents, I, too, could be found to have used sound judgement, etc, yet still be found guilty of manslaughter - and jailed. Yet this has not happened in this case, and at Krue Se, the government's own investigative panel found that the military used excessive force, resulting in 32 deaths - again, without charges, let alone courts-martial.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn noted that "Justice is conscience, not a personal conscience but the conscience of the whole of humanity. Those who clearly recognise the voice of their own conscience usually recognise also the voice of justice".

My conscience tells me that justice has not been served in the Tak Bai case. If yours tells you likewise, dear reader, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva owes us, and especially the South, a clear explanation of how the verdict was just or he should order it appealed immediately.

BURIN KANTABUTRA

BANGKOK

Time for the world to intervene in Burma

Last Wednesday the Burmese government tried to show how reasonable and civilised it is. It allowed 30 diplomats and 10 reporters to attend the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi. The next day the trial was closed and it reverted to the same sickening charade, the same cynical attitude to the rest of the world. On Friday we heard that this criminal gang that has taken over Burma is saying that the American - Mr Yettaw who swam across the lake to Suu Kyi's house - was her boyfriend!

Does anybody believe this nonsense? Do the Chinese or Russians who have kept very quiet believe it? Do the Burmese believe it? Does anybody in the Asean countries or the West believe it?


The Burmese criminal gang obviously doesn't really care if anybody believes it or not. They are going to keep Suu Kyi in prison so that she is unable to take part in the election next year.

The junta has shown, once again, that it just does not care. Now is the time for the rest of the world to prepare to help the Burmese people in the event of an uprising. The UN should be prepared to go into Burma to stop the generals massacring the civilian population.

Asean has started to criticise the junta and this is good. The West needs to make it clear to China that the bloodbath that is looming is not acceptable. There must come a time when the rest of the world should intervene and that time is now.

DAVID WENMAN

CHIANG MAI

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The Nation



National

DEEP SOUTH DEATHS Attacks Continue as bomb blast Kills 3

Published on June 8, 2009

Violence seen as response to clearance of Tak Bai officials

A powerful bomb killed two people in the deep South yesterday as Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva reached out to the survivors of the Tak Bai massacre following a controversial court ruling that cleared security officers involved in the incident.

During his weekly TV address one day before his official visit to Malaysia, Abhisit promised to extend government assistance to the families of the victims.

But he withheld comment on the May 29 decision that absolved security officials of charges of misconduct in the deaths of 85 unarmed Malay Muslim demonstrators five years ago.

On the day of the verdict, Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban said the government would spend Bt63 billion from now until 2012 on development projects for 2,900 villages, starting with 696 villages this year.

Abhisit said the violence used by previous governments had aggravated the tension. He vowed to focus on development, saying the government's cash infusion would reach the region in August or September.

In what appeared to be a blunt response to the judgement, militants last week stepped attacks in the restive region, killing public school teachers and carrying out target killings of suspected government collaborators.

Yesterday's explosion was aimed at a police team investing an ambush against defence volunteers in Narathiwat's Yingor district. A shop owner and a defence volunteer officer were killed in the blast, while another died in hospital and 19 were wounded.

Insurgents wounded four paramilitary rangers in Narathiwat's Rusoh district who were patrolling in the province, while a villager was also hit, police said.

The four men were riding motorbikes on a back road of the district when they were ambushed by men with M16 assault rifles from the roadside.

On Saturday night in Narathiwat, the deputy director of an elementary school was shot dead as he returned home from praying at a mosque, police said.

Last Tuesday, men disguised as soldiers set up a fake roadblock and opened fire on a vehicle, slaying two teachers including one who was eight months pregnant.

Opinion

Bordered Identities and the Search for Conflict Resolution

Published on June 9, 2009

The end of the Pattani sultanate, and the forceful assimilation of the southern regions of today's Thailand into the modern Siamese/Thai nation, did not mean the end of a virtual nation, or a nation without a state.

While the Malay Muslim nation - and the borders that inscribe it - was, and is, more virtual than real, its power to mobilise some parts of the Muslim population of the South did not disappear. In this regard, the existence of a Malay world on the other side of the border did not diminish in importance. On the contrary, it could be argued that its existence as foci of attention, as well as a source of sustenance, both moral and material, has increased in importance. A Pattani nation-state does not exist, but a virtual Malay nation (one sharing the same language, religion and way of life) encompasses people on both sides of the border, in contrast to the Thai nation of which Pattani is officially part. This Malay nation is not defined by its physical borders but by a sense of cultural space. In this sense, the unrest in southern Thailand is not merely an internal domestic Thai problem; it is, in its roots, an inter 'national' one. Islam feeds into this problematic situation insofar as it is the strongest of all signifiers of difference. Yet, an Islamic affirmation alone is not sufficient to explain the separatist movement, for the non-Malay Muslims of Thailand in other parts of the kingdom seem to readily accept their membership within the Thai nation. In the case of southern Thailand, Islam simply provides a further ideological underpinning for the rejection of the rule by an 'infidel occupier' of the territory of a Malay Muslim majority.

This absolutist rejection of the Thai state would in itself make compromise scarcely possible in the pursuit of the irredentist dream. However, the nature of the present insurgency makes this even more difficult. Unlike the previous generation of insurgents, the new generation lacks a coherent organisational structure and, above all, a coherent political programme. On the contrary, the violent struggle - with its millenarian anarchist overtones - appears to be an end in itself. The result of little import is insofar as the return to an imagined golden age, or at least to Muslim piety, would create the basis of a new order. Yet even this conclusion on ends and rationalities is perhaps excessive. The underlying problem for the Thai authorities, as they clumsily try to deal with the unrest in the South, is that they are bereft of credible interlocutors with a negotiating mandate. As the latent civil war dimension of the conflict is brought deliberately, or unwittingly, to the fore, and individuals and communities are forced to take sides or are cowered into silence, the space for compromise or accommodation diminishes daily.

With the new generation of insurgents, the borders of ethnic separation are being reinforced. The amount of physical space that was once shared by ethnic Thais and ethnic Malays is being reduced daily. Previous neutral areas, for example the grounds of temples and monasteries, are no longer neutral. Their occupation by soldiers or paramilitary forces to protect the monks against aggression, has meant that they are recuperated in the domain of the Thai state. In a similar fashion, public schools and their teachers are considered legitimate targets for attack. While both Malay Muslim and ethnic Thai Buddhist children may attend, they are often branded as symbols of Siamese occupation. Moreover, as many Muslim parents choose to have their children educated in traditional Islamic schools (pondoks), the ethnic divide is reinforced. While previously, these parents' main motivation might have been the desire to have their children educated in the Islamic religion and values, due to increasing violence, fear has entered into parental considerations. This educational apartheid

engenders a cycle of further exclusion and separation, for pondok educated children are less well-equipped to find a place in the modern economy. But that is indeed the point, for the irredentist dream implies a rejection of the modern and a return to a golden age.

Islam, we have suggested, is one element of identity differentiation in the South. This has led us to debunk the global jihadist/terrorist narrative on the insurrection in southern Thailand and, instead, to consider the conflict in terms of ethnocentric irredentism. It could be hypothesised that a triple identification may preclude, obviate, or make meaningless membership in an intermediate, or at least fourth community: that of the Thai nation. The first form of identification is with a global community of believers, the ummah. Membership within the Malay world constitutes a second form of identification, with a trans-, or rather, extra-national community. Finally, at the local level, there is identification with a local Malay Muslim Pattani community. This conundrum is inherent to the field of identity bargaining that is the common lot of many peoples in the contemporary world.

In many other parts of Thailand, minority groups continually negotiate their membership within the Thai nation. The real challenge is to understand how, in most cases, the process of addressing identity challenges, if not necessarily resolving them, is handled by peaceful means, whereas in other (marginal) contexts, such as southern Thailand, the challenges were addressed with violent conflict. Future research on Thailand needs to look at the means in which these other, ostensible minority, groups negotiate their place on a daily basis within the Thai state. Part of the answer lies in the acceptance by these groups, including non-Malay Muslims, of their imposed status as a minority. The conundrum behind the violence in southern Thailand is the non-acceptance of the minority status as the people in the South consider themselves the majority.

The construction of the Thai nation, and the making of a national culture, has enabled all 'minority' groups (the Mon, Khmer, Lao, Chinese, and so on) except the Malays of the South, to see themselves as Thai, and concomitantly to be regarded by the Thai authorities as loyal subjects within the kingdom. This sense of 'Thainess' involves the acceptance of the three pillars of Thai society: nation, religion and monarchy. For members of these above-mentioned communities, there is no contradiction between being a Thai and being, say a Hindu, a Christian or a Muslim. Why don't the Malay Muslims of Pattani have a similar sense of dual identities (and loyalties)? One reason is that, unlike most of the other groups mentioned, they are territorially bounded in the kingdom. A second related factor in the restive region in the sense that Pattani has always existed, an existence with its glorious past that shapes ethno-religious consciousness. The Thai Buddhists enter into this world as "invaders". With religion and ethnicity being the Janis face of difference/separation and rejection, it appears that only a return to Darul Islam of Malay Pattani would satisfy the most hard-line militants of the new generation.

Note: This article was an excerpt from a chapter written by Sciences Po's David Camroux and The Nation's Don Pathan in Nikki Slocum-Bradley's "Promoting Conflict or Peace through Identity", a project of the United Nations University, Belgium.

National

A BREAK FROM THE PAST PM wins Najib backing on South

Published on June 9, 2009

Joint visit agreed upon; economic progress seen as key to winning hearts in Muslim stronghold

Kuala Lumpur - In an unprecedented move to quell Thailand's southern unrest, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and his Malaysian counterpart, Najib Razak, are planning to visit the region to show they are united in tackling the conflict.

The announcement came as another Thai soldier and a rubber tapper were killed in militant attacks near Narathiwat yesterday and eight soldiers were wounded.

Najib told reporters in Kuala Lumpur after meeting with Abhisit that he and the Thai leader planned to visit Islamic religious schools in the Malay-speaking South "so that the right kind of message can be transmitted". No date was immediately scheduled for the visit.

"We remain optimistic that things can get a lot better if we continue to emphasise economic development, on giving them a better future," Najib said.

Leaders of both countries discussed measures to bring economic progress to the border area, including Malaysia's role in providing scholarships for Muslim students and helping develop the education system in Thai provinces bordering northern Malaysia.

"In terms of creating opportunities, particularly for young people in the area, I think Malaysia has very important contributions," Abhisit said after meeting Najib.

The united stance was a break from the past, which was filled with suspicion between the two governments.

Thai security officials complained about Malaysia, saying officials there could do more to curb the movement of militants sneaking over the porous border to the Thai side.

Kuala Lumpur has consistently dismissed suggestions it is turning a blind eye to the conflict and at times has criticised Thailand's heavy-handed tactics.

Cooperation between Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur hit an unprecedented low during the Thaksin Shinawatra administration but bounced back during the government of Surayud Chulanont.

During his term, Surayud publicly thanked Malaysia for helping Bangkok by establishing a channel of communication among leaders of long-standing separatist groups living in exile.

But the administrations of Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat could not build on this progress.

Political insiders said Abhisit had been trying to pick up from where Surayud left off and look for ways to work with Kuala Lumpur on the restive region.

One move could involve asking the Malaysian government to facilitate dialogue with the separatist groups, an informed source said. However, this will not be possible until the Thai government agrees on a policy for formal negotiation with the insurgents.

In yesterday's violence, rebels triggered a roadside bomb as 14 troops passed by on patrol, sparking a five-minute gun battle before the insurgents fled. Nine wounded soldiers were taken to hospital, where one later died.

Gunmen opened fire on the rubber-plan-tation worker as he rode his motorcycle to work in another district in Narathiwat, killing him instantly. The casualties came after three deaths in Narathiwat over the weekend.

The insurgency in the provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat erupted in January 2004, and since then 3,700 people have been killed and thousands more wounded.

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Politics

BURNING ISSUE

Here are a few ideas on how to put out fires in the South

Published on June 10, 2009

Like a never-ending vicious cycle violence - from both sides, oppression and discrimination by the state, ignorance by non-Thai-Malay Muslims - feeds into this conflict with no end in sight. The case of 11 killings at a mosque in Narathiwat province on Monday won't be the last.

Forget about the separatists - they're probably beyond reproach. Think instead about how to win the hearts and respect of the moderate Thai-Malay Muslims. If there's any hope, it will be with them, along with the mostly ignorant and indifferent Thai Buddhists who need to re-learn.

Much more can be done and here are some humble suggestions.

1) Win the trust of moderate Thai-Malay Muslims by supporting genuine decentralisation such as elected governors or limited but genuine autonomy.

Those with friends among the moderate Thai-Malay Muslims must have heard them complain why they can't have their own elected governors, given their unique political history. They feel alienated by Bangkok-appointed bigwigs and wish Bangkok should trust them more. It's also an insult to people whose ancestors once belonged to the proud Islam kingdom of Pattani.

Talk to officials who trust you and they will likely say the day a governor is elected is the beginning of the end. A senior police officer in Pattani once told this writer: The bottom line? They simply don't trust the locals but are too shy to tell them directly.

But how can we move forward without mutual trust?

2) The media shouldn't dwell on the weekly violence but do more to include and publicise critical views of the locals. For every violent incident, why not ask a Thai-Malay Muslim to write a commentary to reflect upon the issue?

The Bangkok-centric mainstream mass media doesn't seem to give a hoot, however. But how can we move forward without substantial debate and without engaging the locals with

the rest of the nation.

3) Win their respect by respecting their identity, living culture and history.

Mainstream media mostly refers to these people as "Thai Muslims", which fails to recognise their living Malay culture and language. A "Thai Muslim", need not be Thai-Malay Muslims as they could be of Indian or other origin. How can you win their respect when you don't even recognise their living identity?

Also, as for history, those acquainted with it will know Pattani became part of Siam not through marriage or peaceful union but rape. Have these people no rights whatsoever?

4) Cast aside multimedia state propaganda which portrays Thais or all faith and ethnicity in the deep South as living in eternal harmony .

If that is true, there would have been no Tak Bai incident where 78 Thai-Malay Muslims protesters suffocated to death while being transported in army trucks. There would have been no Krue Se mosque killing, no murder of 11 prayers at another mosque on Monday, no tortures, no daily discrimination, no sense of alienation, and no heartless recent verdict from a cold inquest by which the court concluded that security officials handling the Tak Bai incident were protected by Emergency Decree.

For a change, the government might want to sponsor an essay writing contest amongst high school students in the deep South: "How I feel as a second-class citizen in my very own land" and the winning essay should be published and read nationwide. The more we cast away propaganda, ignorance and indifference the better. It's time to speak frankly as too many people have already died.

For more details, some well-intended Thais from Bangkok and elsewhere might want to head to the deep South for their next vacation. Try to win at least a friend and win his or her trust, stay alive, listen to the person over a long and frank discussion. Try to talk simply as one fellow human being to another and be prepared for a reality check.

This writer had done it a few years back.

Politics

MOSQUE MASSACRE **Attack aimed at discrediting govt**

Published on June 10, 2009

PM needs to rethink ground operations, bring back civilian centre

The massacre at a mosque in Narathiwat was aimed at creating mistrust in the government and worsening the conflict between Buddhists and Muslims, senior officials said yesterday.

A group of masked assailants stormed into Al Pukon mosque in Joh I Rong sub-district on Monday night and sprayed devotees with gunfire, killing ten people on the spot and injuring a dozen others. A victim also died on the way to the hospital.

Rumours spread rapidly that the attack was conducted by government armed forces wanting to avenge the loss of officials over the past few weeks.

Army Commander-in-Chief General Anupong Paochinda, who rushed to region immediately, denied all claims of soldiers being involved in the massacre.

"I condemn any group that has perpetrated this violence," he said, adding that insurgents were trying to pass the blame onto the authorities for this "barbaric act".

"They simply want to raise this issue to an international level by making it look like state authorities are violently suppressing villagers. They want to create a climate of fear," Anupong said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva voiced his concerns, saying his government would work hard to improve the situation.

"The pattern of the attacks has changed and we need to adjust our tactics," Abhisit told reporters.

The PM's deputy secretary Panitan Wattanayagorn said militants staged this attack to get back at the authorities because they were losing territory in the region.

The zone that state officials cannot access has dropped sharply from 400 villages to 200 villages, he said.

"As a result, the militants are using violence and brutality to keep people fearful and gain media attention," explained Panitan, who is also a security expert.

Internal Security Operation Command (Isoc) spokesman Colonel Prinya Chaidilok said the attack was aimed at creating conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims as well as discredit the government.

"They want to make the international community believe that there is a religious conflict between the government and the Muslims," he said. "The insurgents have tried to provoke religious conflict several times before, but it was impossible."

Deputy Interior Minister Thaworn Senneam said he would speak with Abhisit and Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban on whether the government needed to revamp the structure of ground operations in the South, because everything came under the jurisdiction of the military-run Isoc.

The minister said he had laid out a plan for the civilian Southern Border Province Administration Centre (SBPAC) to be given the power to control the unrest.

SBPAC played a crucial role in maintaining peace in the South, but was dissolved by the Thaksin Shinawatra government. Though it was re-established during the military-backed government of General Surayud Chulanont in 2007, it was never given any power because the Isoc had full authority over the region.

Thavorn's idea of civilian supremacy was strongly resisted by the military, even though the armed forces have been unable to contain the violence.

Since 2004, some 3,500 people have been killed in the South so far, with nobody taking responsibility for the attacks.

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Opinion

Will Malaysia get the mediator's role to resolve South conflict?

Published on June 10, 2009

It's difficult for any Thai government to qualify what constituted a successful visit to Malaysia. In this respect, it's a matter of all's well that ends well.

This assumption has been more or less the guiding principle between the two countries ever since a new generation of Patani Malay militants emerged in the deep South about eight years ago, putting Thai-Malaysian relations in an unwanted spotlight.

At first, the new generation of militants were dismissed as "sparrow bandits" by the Thai government. But after a daring raid on an army battalion on January 2004 in which they made off with more than 300 pieces of weapons, Bangkok could no longer ignore the political underpinning of the act.

Although it was obvious that the theatre of violence had switched from remote hilltops to towns and villages, Bangkok stuck to its obsolete counter-insurgency methods that included massive build-up of troops sent to the region with heavy fire power. The troops immediately sealed off and placed a number of highly contested areas under curfew.

Until today, the security grid that was put in place immediately after the January 2004 raid, has done nothing in terms of curbing the activities and mobility of the insurgents. Instead, the high number of troops have only provided the insurgents with a wider selection of targets. Roadside bombings and ambushes have become a daily reality as political leaders talk about winning the hearts and minds of the Patani Malays.

It is an open secret that the ongoing violence has revived the old suspicions that originated in the Cold War days when Communist rebels and Patani Malay separatists operated along the common border.

While no one can deny the security concerns of both countries, nevertheless, it was generally agreed that diplomacy should dictate the terms of the bilateral relations.

In spite of repeated statements from both governments that the conflict is Thailand's internal matter, the conflict continues to make Kuala Lumpur extremely edgy because of the geographical proximity. Thailand and Malaysia share a porous border where people cross back and forth with virtually no interference from the officials.

During the Thaksin government, Thai officials often pointed their fingers at Malaysia, accusing the southern neighbour of not doing enough to curb cross-border activities.

Kuala Lumpur has been quick to point to the fact that militants arrested or taken down in gunfights are all Thai citizens and that the theatre of violence has shifted from the remote hilltops along the common border to towns and cities inside Thai territories. In other words, this generation of insurgents are essentially home-grown with no real link to sympathetic Muslim governments in the Middle East or elsewhere.

Two decades ago, at the height of the insurgency, Patani Malay separatists received training support from countries like Syria and Libya. A blanket amnesty in the early 1990s crippled their military wings on the ground as field commanders and foot soldiers put down their weapons and returned to their villages.

Many remained abroad, taking up citizenship of their respective countries. In recent years, senior political figures in Malaysia and Indonesia - including former Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohammed and Indonesian vice president Yusuf Kalla, in their private capacity, have taken a shot at mediating the conflict between the insurgents and the Thai government. But none of their efforts, or the initiatives by foreign NGOs, have gained any real traction, partly because Bangkok could not come up with a policy on negotiating with the separatists, whether they are old guards from the previous generations or the new generation of militants operating on the ground.

As expected, the ongoing insurgency in the deep South was high on the agenda during Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's one-day visit to Kuala Lumpur where he was received by his counterpart, Najib Razak.

As a sign of solidarity, Abhisit and Najib said they would make a joint visit to the restive region "so that the right kind of message can be transmitted".


Symbolism aside, the decision to visit the region together was a bold move, indeed. At the least, it is a strong statement from Kuala Lumpur that it respects Thailand's territorial integrity - the artificial political border that cuts through Malays' historical homeland called Patani.

Abhisit might have to reciprocate by granting the Patani Malays more cultural space. In other words, their citizenship in the Thai state should not have to come at the expense of their membership in the Malay-speaking world. He would have to appreciate the fact that the Patani Malays have an entirely different set of historical and cultural narrative - in this case, a century-old occupation of the Malay historical homeland by invading Siamese forces.

Whether this display of solidarity between him and Najib will translate into something more meaningful - such as giving Kuala Lumpur the full mandate to mediate between the Thai government and the separatists - on the other hand, remains to be seen.

But such a mandate may be hard to come by because many top brass in Thailand see

Malaysia, because of the country's geographical proximity and the historical ties to the old guards, as a stakeholder to the conflict, not a potential broker.

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Politics

SOUTH CRISIS Bt18bn earmarked for the region

Published on June 11, 2009

Budget to focus on development; military operation to stay untouched

The government plans to inject more than Bt18 billion next year into the deep South where violence continues to escalate, senior officials said yesterday.

Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban, who oversees security matters, called an urgent meeting yesterday after a brutal attack at a Narathiwat mosque Monday night killed 11 people and injured more than a dozen others as they prayed.

The meeting focused on next year's budget plan for development projects in the predominantly Muslim region, Suthep said.

Deputy Interior Minister Thaworn Senneam said the government would allocate the Bt 18 billion from the next fiscal year's annual budget and economic stimulus package for the region.

The National Economic and Social Development Board would review the plan to clean out overlapping projects before submitting it to Cabinet, he said.

Army chief Anuphong Paochinda said the meeting did not demand structural changes to ground operations. It was a politically-realistic military operation to contain the violence, without the military dominance of the region many critics had claimed, he said.

"The military was not down there to merely contain violence but to protect sovereignty and territory from separatists," he said.

"If we didn't have armed forces on the ground, the insurgents would control the areas, resulting in a government failure to deliver development services to local people," he said.

The 40,000 armed forces were deployed in the region only to protect the 2.1 million people of the southernmost provinces and to do development works, he said.

The militants managed to set up their own administrative branches in at least 217 villagers

in the deep South, Anuphong said, but officials were working hard to win the hearts and minds of the people.


"We are changing villages to become normal, where residents are cooperating with the authorities as usual," he said.

Violence in the deep South since the beginning of 2004 has killed more than 3500 people so far.

Thaworn said the situation had improved since the Democrat-led government took power over the past five months, with incidents declining between January and May compared to the same period last year.

However, Deep South Watch, a Prince of Songkhla University-based violence monitoring unit, said violence has increased since March to stay above 100 incidents per month, while it was below 100 incidents per month before March.

Yesterday militants killed a woman worker and injured two others in a gun attack in Yala's Muang district, police said. The militant fired on the workers while they were taking lunch at the work site.

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Politics

SOUTHERN VIOLENCE **Monks gunned down in yala**

Published on June 13, 2009

One dead, one injured in latest religious attack

A Buddhist monk was shot dead and another injured in a gun attack in Yala's Muang district yesterday morning.

Police said the incident was aimed at deepening the divide between Buddhists and Muslims in the restive deep South.

Two men on a motorbike fired AK-47s at the two monks while they were collecting their morning alms.

The attack killed Phra Sombat Srisuwanwichian, 60, and injured Phra Thawatchai Chaiyamarn, 24.

Colonel Phumphet Pipatpetphum, deputy commander of the Yala Provincial Police, said the assailants wanted to provoke anger among Buddhists in the predominantly Muslim region.

"They want Buddhists to stay afraid and distrust their Muslim neighbours, in order to deepen divisions within society," he said.

Yesterday's attack was not the first aimed at monks. Many Buddhist monks and temples have been victims of the violence that began on January 4, 2004. At least five monks have been killed to date.

The attack came only three and a half days after a massacre at a mosque in Narathiwat that saw 11 Muslim worshippers killed and a dozen injured.

Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban said yesterday's attack was not a case of Muslim revenge on Buddhists but rather militants bent on fostering religious strife.

Suthep will fly to the deep South today to inspect ground operations in a bid to ensure better security for monks.

Before leaving for Cambodia yesterday, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said officials should quickly bring the culprits to justice in order to restore confidence in the authorities.

Fourth Army Region Commander Lt-General Pichet Wisaichorn, who oversees the area, urged local residents to retain confidence in the authorities.

"Don't allow the militants to use you for their own purposes. Please believe that the government and the Army are working hard to raise the standard of living here," he told a press conference.

The government is pouring money into the restive region, hoping to win local hearts and minds.

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved Bt18 billion for operations in fiscal 2010. Another Bt54 billion for 300 development projects between next year and 2012 was approved on Thursday.

The Public Health Ministry will next week ask the Cabinet to approve an additional Bt36 million for scholarships to 3,000 nursing students from the deep South, a government source said.

Senator Worawit Baru said pouring money and soldiers into the southernmost provinces might not address the root cause of the problem.

Instead, the government should seriously consider a new administrative form for the predominantly Muslim region, one that gives the locals the right to self-determination.

"One possible special measure for the deep South is a special ministry or bureau in which local people could actively participate," he said.

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National

5 killed, many injured in southern gun, bomb attacks

Published on June 14, 2009

Suspected insurgents in Southern Thailand yesterday killed five people and injured several others in shooting and bomb attacks.

The attacks on Friday night and yesterday took place while Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban visited the region to expedite the investigation into the Narathiwat mosque shooting that left 11 dead on Monday.

In Muang Yala, just before midday yesterday, a 50-year-old Buddhist woman, Saowanit Senapat, was killed and 14 others, including a 12-year-old girl, were injured when two men on a motorcycle threw a grenade into a six-wheel public transport truck carrying commuters to work on Yala's Keulong Industrial Estate.

In Narathiwat's Bacho district, 31-year-old nursery teacher and village headman's wife Supaporn Dongsam was shot dead, and her female friend Parawisa Wangkaew, 31, was wounded in a drive-by shooting at 12.10pm.

Less than an hour earlier, two suspected insurgents pretended to be customers looking for a drink at a grocery store and planted a one-kilogram home-made bomb inside the shop's refrigerator.

They triggered the bomb by remote control shortly after they left the scene, and six people in the shop were injured. While the officials were inspecting the bomb scene, a bomb threat to the Bacho post office was phoned in, prompting officials to check it. No bomb was found.

In Yala's Bannang Sata district, police found the bodies of 37-year-old Chiang Mai native Jakor Yapa and his wife Buahom Panyarak left by the Bannag Sata-Tham To road at 1pm yesterday.

The couple, travelling by motorcycle from Songkhla's Hat Yai district to Betong, had been shot dead, and their attackers, suspected to be more than four people, used their motorcycle to flee the scene.

On Friday night, suspected insurgents reportedly killed 19-year-old Muslim Sulaiman Budee out of his home and killed him with an AK-47 in Yala's Bannang Sata district.

Opinion

EDITORIAL

UN should treat Burma as it has North Korea

Published on June 14, 2009

Security Council's new-found unity shows it can overcome its own past

After long and excruciating negotiations over the new sanctions by the United Nations Security Council to punish North Korea for its nuclear-weapons test, once again the council has shown its ability to act in response to a crisis that genuinely threatens global peace and stability. What Pyongyang has done has so rubbed the raw nerves of key players that they are acting with common positions and standards. It is rare indeed for them to agree on common retaliation against North Korea's stubbornness.

This time the harsher sanctions are more targeted, including weapons exports and financial transactions. Furthermore, the resolution allows inspections in port and on the high seas of ships suspected of carrying nuclear technology. It urges North Korea to return to the six-party talks immediately without conditions and abandon its nuclear ambitions. This shows the determination of the 15-member council to adhere to its international obligations.

Unfortunately, the same thing cannot be said of the council's attitude towards Burma and its continued oppression of its citizens. Although the council adopted a non-binding resolution last month in response to the continued detention and farcical trial of Aung San Suu Kyi, it still lacks the teeth to punish one of the world's worst regimes. Like North Korea, Burma's military leaders know how to test the water and push the envelope. They have succeeded before, knowing full well that the council, with its different players and national interests, will never agree on a common plan of action. Worse, the council's attention span is usually brief given the myriad global issues confronting it.

For the time being, the Burmese junta is obviously correct in its assessment. Despite some bridging of the gap between members preferring tougher sanctions and those advocating a softer approach, the council does not see eye to eye on reprimanding Burma. Of course, the five permanent members have something to do with this. Previously, both China and Russia opposed any attempt by the council to punish Burma for nearly two decades of continued intransigence. They have since ameliorated their positions but are no nearer uniting with the other members to deliver a stronger message.

Obviously the junta leaders are now playing hide and seek, testing the international community's determination and the sustainability of Asean positions against them, as

witness their attempt to create havoc along the Thai border following Thailand's growing assertiveness by attacking minority groups so as to scarce the Thai security forces. This pattern of diplomatic brinksmanship has worked for the junta all along. If the international community, particularly the council, remains divided, pariah states can continue to exploit it. The new sanctions against North Korea are a case in point.

Burma has delayed the trial of Suu Kyi for an additional two weeks. Of course, the junta is watching closely how the international community reacts to the ongoing court case and to her plight. International pressure has increased by the day. Major world leaders have spoken in support of her and called for her release. Asean has been firm. Burma's continued attack on Thailand as the Asean chair is aimed at undermining its position as such. It is to be hoped that Asean positions will be bolstered by increasing support from the international community.

The North Koreans and the Burmese have suffered tremendously because of their leaders. Both countries have spent heavily on arms and left their citizens starving in the expectation of foreign assistance. The Burmese have risen several times since 1988 demanding democratic change and been violently put down. This could happen again due to economic hardship and rising fuel prices. The North Koreans have yet to do this.

It is pivotal that when the council puts its mind to fighting pariah states such as North Korea and Burma it is intelligent and united, otherwise it will be manipulated and exploited, especially when there are cracks in its ranks. It backed Friday's tough sanctions against North Korea; it is to be hoped that in the near future it will do the same in the case of Burma.

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National

SOUTH CRISIS

Man decapitated, body burnt by militants in Yala

Published on June 15, 2009

A 53-year-old man was beheaded and his body burnt on Monday by insurgents in Yala's Than To district, police said.

The victim's headless body, was found in a durian plantation in the district Yala's Than To district, police said. He was stabbed several times before his assailants chopped off his head and then burnt his remains.

Police said the victim's head was found on top of a spade, not far from the crime scene.

A leaflet written in Thai was left near the body saying: "This revenge is to remember the innocent people killed by officials inside the mosque."

The leaflet referred to the massacre at Al-Furqan mosque in Narathiwat's Joh I Rong district on June 8.

Masked gunmen fires with M-16 assault rifles and shotguns on about 50 Thai Muslims as they were at evening prayer at the local mosque.

Eleven people were killed and 12 wounded in that incident.

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Politics

SOUTHERN VIOLENCE

Rubber worker beheaded and burnt

Published on June 16, 2009

Leaflet claims brutal killing was retaliation for 'mosque attack by officials'

A rubber-plantation worker was beheaded and burnt beyond recognition in the southernmost Yala province yesterday in what police say was revenge on Buddhists for last week's massacre at a Narathiwat mosque. Kimxiang Saetang's headless body was found in a plantation in Than To district at about 10am yesterday. He may have died two days earlier, police said.

Police found the head in a bamboo hut in front of the plantation, metres from the body.

Also at the crime scene was a machete and a leaflet written in Thai saying: "This was revenge for innocent people killed by officials at the mosque."

Last Monday, a group of assailants killed 11 Muslims at prayer and injured a dozen others in the mosque in Narathiwat's Joh I Rong district.

Two days later, a Buddhist monk was shot dead and another injured in Yala. Police believed the militants targeted the Buddhist monks to create a rift between the region's Buddhists and Muslims.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, during yesterday's House of Representatives meeting, said that his government would allocate funds to the deep South in a way that would be truly in line with the local residents' needs.

He said that he would measure success in solving the region's problems by the ability to reduce the security forces sent in. "I don't think we will keep sending in people and money endlessly to tackle the problems," he said.

The premier stressed that ensuring justice to the locals would be the key in his government's efforts to end insurgent violence in the deep South.

In neighbouring Pattani province, a janitor was shot dead while riding a motorbike to work at a school in Saiburi district yesterday, police said.

Prom Wichianrat, 59, was attacked by a gunman on a motorbike who fired at him with a pistol at around 7.30am.

In another incident in Narathiwat yesterday, Museng Masu, 40, was shot dead in a drive-by shooting attack in Bajoh district as he was walking along a road.

Police said the attack might have been motivated by personal conflict, or was more of the violence that has plagued the predominantly Muslim region since 2004.

Former prime minister Chuan Leekpai has called a meeting with members of Parliament from five southernmost provinces to consult with them on seeking a solution to the violence.

The meeting agreed the structure of ground operations needed to be changed, said Democrat Party spokesman Buranat Samutrak, to boost the civilian role - rather than emphasising military operations.

Deputy Interior Minister Thaworn Senneam, a Democrat, proposed the Office of the Southern Border Province Administrative Centre run the region, replacing the military-run Internal Security Operation Command. The military opposed the idea.

However, the meeting suggested all agencies should work in close cooperation, Buranat said.

Thaworn did not set a time frame for pushing forward the restructuring, saying the existing structure could work for the time being, with the military and government in tandem.

MPs in the meeting said they were confident about the government's plans to solve the problem, but it would take time, he said.

National

PM stands by Thaworn as more die in south

Published on June 17, 2009

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva yesterday defended Deputy Interior Minister Thaworn Senneam's performance in dealing with the deep South's insurgency problems, insisting he had no plans to replace him.

Abhisit said he sympathised with Thaworn, whom he said had been working actively dealing with the southern problems.

"It is not an easy job. I have followed his work. Thaworn visits the area frequently and is not aloof in dealing with the matter," the prime minister said.

When asked about mounting disappointment over Thaworn's performance, Abhisit said he saw no reason why the deputy interior minister should be replaced.

The premier said in response to the recent surge of violence in the deep South, he had instructed security authorities to alter their tactics in the face of a changing environment. He said the key to restoring peace in the region was to ensure justice and fair opportunities and to get rid of distrust among local people.

Thaworn said yesterday he believed the proposal by the opposition Pheu Thai Party for him to be replaced by Democrat MP Nipon Bunyamanee was an attempt to create a rift within the ruling party.

"It's just a game by the opposite side to create a rift. They are trying to have me removed even though the efforts to solve the southern problems have been on the right path," he said.

In a related development, a group of Buddhist monks from the deep South yesterday submitted a petition to the prime minister asking for a swift solution to the chronic insurgency problem.

The monks handed their petition to the PM's deputy secretarygeneral, Panitan Watanayagorn.

Phra Maha Surin Panyathipo, a monk from Pattani, said Buddhist monks in more than 70

local temples have been affected by the renewed violence as they are unable to make morning alms rounds. "Monks in three to four temples are starving because Buddhists have moved out of the area," the monk said.

In Pattani yesterday, suspected Muslim insurgents set off a bomb that killed two policemen and fatally shot a Buddhist teacher, police said.

The homemade bomb hidden in a motorcycle exploded outside Pattani's Sai Buri district police station, killing a policeman instantly and injuring two others. One of the injured officers later died in hospital.

The bomb exploded as the policemen were removing the motorcycle from a pickup truck for investigation after it was found abandoned on a road.

In a separate incident, the 55yearold teacher was riding a motorcycle to her school in Yala when at least two assailants killed her in a driveby shooting.

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