

News Wrap

A G D

With four consulates in Afghanistan, India looks forward to stability in the region. India hopes that Afghanistan will allow electricity transmission lines from Central Asia, and also oil and gas pipelines from the belt. One gas-pipe-line project meanders from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan, and on to India. Another project crosses from Iran, through Pakistan to India. While USA is in opposition to the second project, the first project is obstructed by instability in Afghanistan. At Gwadar in Baluchistan, there is a Chinese-Pakistani joint-venture port. This is being countered by the Iranian-Indian venture to build a free port at Chabahar, in the Gulf of Oman. Indian engineers are currently linking Afghanistan's ring road to the Iranian border.

Pakistan accuses India of encouraging secessionist ethnic Pushtuns, in Pakistan; and financing separatist militants in Baluchistan. The ethnic-Tajik members in the Afghan government are looked upon as anti-Pakistan, India sympathisers. Areas on the Afghan-South Waziristan (Pakistan) border are a rear base for the Taliban. Aware that NATO will not remain indefinitely in Afghanistan, Pakistan considers Afghanistan as a "strategic depth", which would allow Pak forces a rear corridor, in the eventuality another of war with India possibly over Kashmir.

¶....¶....¶

A joint venture in India for thin-sheet steel for cars, is being set up by Nippon Steel of Tokyo and Tata Steel. 25% steel sold in Japan is of auto-grade, while about 5 to 8% steel sold in India can be inputs for cars. The proposed alliance will rival Arcelor Mittal, the world's largest steel company.

¶....¶....¶

Eleven Indian states face continued disputes over six rivers, as defined under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, The contentions range over Ravi and Beas (Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan), Cauvery (Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry) Krishna (Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra), Mondovi (Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra), and Vamsadhara (Andhra Pradesh and Orissa). The government at the centre is now considering inclusion of water resources from the state list to the concurrent list, if not to the union list.

¶....¶....¶

Rumours and fear surround Nandigram in East Midnapur district. Muslims account for 50% of the population, and they have traditionally supported the Congress. Lok Sabha Elections have produced swing results, viz 1977 (won by Janata Party), 1982 / 1987 / 1991 (won by CPI), 1996 (won by Congress), and 2001 / 2005 (won by CPI). The Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind has been a socio-religious body, but has now floated a political wing, named People's Democratic Conference. The anti-industry processions and meetings have witnessed shifting political allegiance. About 110 roads, culverts, bridges and canals are cut off and breached by the save land committee members.

During 1977 to 1987, there was large scale forcible occupation of "rayat" and vested land for thousands of peasants in Nandigram. The unrecorded 'bargadars' and forcible illegal occupants of land, form the vast majority in Nandigram; and they feel threatened

by any land acquisition. Whereas, in Singur, the unrecorded 'bargadars' are a smaller section, who feel insecure.

Since January '07, when the Haldia Development Authority displayed a notice regarding the likely location of the SEZ project, CPI(M) panchayat members and sympathisers have been brutally attacked. CPI(M) offices and the houses of party workers and supporters have been looted or burnt down. About 2500 CPI(M) supporters have been reportedly driven out of Nandigram and they have been living in 'relief camps', for over two months.

It is disturbing to note that following directives from the union government, to achieve large scale oil exploration in the Bay of Bengal the Left Front state government had acquired 700 acres of land in Haldia, to set up a rig manufacturing unit, casual jobs were provided to the hundreds of people who lost their land, by the industrial unit at Jellinghum. Since it was unviable, oil exploration in the Bay of Bengal has been shelved forever! Consequently, the rig manufacturing unit has closed shutters and the casual labourers who earlier lost their lands have now lost their jobs. □□□