

NEWS WRAP

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During the last ten years, India and China have signed up to an international order, consisting of globalized trade and rules based relations amongst the regional states. A 'harmonized world' and "New security concepts" have caused "power shifts". The principle of "Non-interference in each other's affairs" governs relations amongst the ten members of ASEAN. China, India, South Korea, Japan and Pakistan have since signed ASEAN's "Treaty of Amity and Co-operation", an undertaking never to use force against its members for any reason.

Besides, China is part of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Forum, whose members are spread across the Pacific. Asian Neighbours are brought closer to China by the East Asia Summit and the regional forum of the Association of South-East Asian Nations. China is linked with Russia and Central Asia through the Shanghai Co-operation Organization. Specialization and integration have spurred trade within East Asia to grow at a pace faster than the region's trade with the rest of the world. Along with the planned extension of the New Qinghai-Lhasa railway, China is building roads, ports and pipelines in Myanmar and Pakistan, connecting West and South-West China, with the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.

Demands of regional stability and opening up to trade make the XIV South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation summit important. But the summit concluded at New Delhi, without significant progress on trade and terrorism. The summit agreed to operationalize the SAARC Development Fund, establish the South Asian University, create a SAARC arbitration council. The declaration on conclusion called for implementation of the South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) agreement. Targeted killing of civilians and terrorist violence have been condemned.

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This year is the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of Slave Trade Act, passed in England in 1807. The Abolition of Slavery Act (1833) led to payments of large compensation to slave owners. America abolished slavery in 1863. There were attempts by the British Navy to block the slave trade along the Red Sea in the 1930s. Slavery was abolished in Ethiopia in 1931, and in Saudi Arabia in 1962.

Human trafficking and slave labour is rising in Europe, and bonded labour continues in India. Though slavery was criminalized in Niger in 2003, human rights organizations believe that about a million people continue to be under bondage, specially those born into slavery, from slave parents.

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About 65,000 educated young men have ventured into small tea plantation in the ten districts of upper Assam, over the last fifteen years. These small tea growers (STG) contribute to nearly 15% of Assam's tea production. These first generation tea planters grow tea on fallow government land, for which there is no accompanying document. Hence they are deprived of various incentives offered by the Tea Board. Since the small planters cultivate tea on government land without land 'pattas' and proper documents, the Tea Board has registered only about 2900 small planters, over the last ten years. The Tea Board considers a tea planter as a small tea grower, if the size of the plantation does not exceed ten to twelve hectares. Incentives from the Tea Board extend to 25% subsidy

and financial assistance for purchase of tractors, spray machines and other connected machine tools.

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The approach paper on agriculture, prepared by the union government for the Eleventh Five Year Plan, targets 4% growth in agriculture. For the 12 states of the 20 major states, agricultural growth targets at more than 4%; while for the other 8 states the growth target is 3 to 4%. Only Gujarat and Kerala can be expected to achieve more than 3% growth in crop production. The other 18 states should grow at 2 to 3% in crop production, during 2007-08. Live-stock in 12 states is expected to grow by 6%; while the remaining 8 states are expected to achieve 5% in horticulture activities. Sustainable agricultural growth is limited by the sizes of cultivated areas, and stagnating productivity levels.

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Major industrial, projects are developing in Haldia, and a 12,500-acre multiproduct special economic zone (SEZ) is scheduled to be completed in the next fifteen years. Although the Haldia Development Authority (HDA) was formed in 1980, it had drawn and notified the land use and development control plan for the 80,782 acres (258 mouzas) only in 2000. The West Bengal government included 1,07,325 acres under the HDA in 2004, but no land use plan was drawn up till May 2006. Of the 4259 acres of land acquired, 32% (1384 acres) remained unutilized till March '06. The HDA obtained loans of about Rs. 101.77 crores from the state government, between 1980 and 2005, at interest rates of 10.5 to 15%. Neither the interest nor any portion of the principal has been repaid. The outstanding interest is Rs 102.13 crores, as in March 06. There have been no prescribed forms and time schedules for the annual HDA budget, as in March '06.

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