

NEWS WRAP

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The fortieth anniversary of the Six day War, between Israel and the neighbouring Arab countries, occurs in 2007. As the cycle of violence proceeds unabated, Israel has constructed a separation wall in Gaza and the West Bank. Three quarters of the population in Beit Hanoun and other parts of Gaza live in poverty. When the Palestinians and the Israelis exchange fire across the Gaza border, Israeli tanks enter Beit Hanoun, and isolate the town from the rest of Gaza. Encircled Palestinian city-states like Ramallah and Jenin, have been created along the occupied West Bank, by the separation wall. The separation wall besides protecting Israel from terrorism, inflicts severe human suffering on the Palestinians.

Gaza consists of a twenty five-by-five square miles strip of land, which is one of the world's most densely populated and poor regions. This tract of land is now part of Palestine, after the dismantling of Israeli settlements in 2005. But the people of Gaza strip, cannot control their lives, movements and economy. Streets in Gaza city are full of men carrying Kalashnikov rifles and vans transporting young Palestinian armed militias. 60% of Gaza's 1.5 million population, are below eighteen years. Education facilities are inadequate, and teachers have to function several class room shifts, to meet the rising need for school education. When Israeli tanks enter Gaza, the Beit Hanoun Hospital is isolated by Israeli tanks; and ambulances are prevented from leaving. Israeli incursions cut off water, electricity and communication to the hospital. Medicines are scarce, and majority of the population find the diagnostic facilities unavailable. Specialist care is scarce; and there are severe shortages of vascular, orthopedic, neurosurgical, and mental health services. Patients from the occupied territory are sent to Egypt, Jordan and Israel for advanced treatment; and the costs are steep.

On grounds that Hamas is a terrorist organization that does not recognize Israel, millions of dollars in aid from USA and the European Union to support the Palestinian administration have been stopped. Funds that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinians, amounts to half of the total revenue of the Palestinian Authority. These funds have also been cut off by Israel. New school buildings and health clinics are demolished by Israel, citing imprecise reasons of security. Absence of re-conciliation between Israel and Palestine, increases Palestine's dependency on Israel and external aid. Israeli checkpoints and the occupation are hampering development of rural Palestinian villages.

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India's single aircraft carrier Viraat has only twelve sea Harrier jumpjets on its deck. The aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov, rechristened 'Vikramaditya' is being rebuilt with sixteen Mig 29K aircraft at the Sevmash shipyard in Severodvinsk City, which was once home to Russia's Northern Fleet. The cost of refurbishing the warship is expected to be about \$1 billion. As the Russian shipbuilders had underestimated the length of cabling in the warship, the floating airfield will not touch Indian shores before 2010, instead of the earlier envisaged target of 2008. To be operational with the Indian Navy, for the next twenty years, the estimates for cabling have been raised from 700 kms to 2400 kms. On the decks of Gorshkov, work on the sky jump is also progressing at a slow speed.

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The Union Power Department's forecasts in the 17th Electric Power Survey indicates peak electricity demand of 1,52,746 mw by 2011-12, which is more than double of the 75,756 mw, required in 2003. The survey's projections presume that the Indian economy will grow at 8 to 10%, over the next five years. The increase in electricity demand is calculated to be higher in the Northern region, than the western region, which includes industrial hubs, viz Maharashtra and Gujarat. The peakload energy consumption would be comparatively lower in the eastern region, comprising poor states like Orissa and Bihar. Twelve States have a double digit compounded annual growth rate for power and energy demand between 2004 to 2011-12, against only four states between 1998-2004. The increase in power demand, as examined by the Electric Power Survey, covers domestic, commercial, public lighting, public water works, irrigation, industrial, railways, and bulk non-industrial sectors.

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As per guidelines enacted by the UPA government in 2004, an independent director on the board of government banks will "ordinarily" be appointed from among those who have special academic training and experience in the fields of marketing, information technology and industry. The minimum educational qualifications of graduation may be relaxed by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), in the case of "farmers, depositors and artisans". Under the category of "artisans", several appointees described in Department of Banking files as "social workers" have been allowed relaxation. The government has filled about 33 of the 37 posts of independent directors or "non official" directors, with men and women, who are closely linked to the Congress party. These Bank directors are either politicians who have lost elections, or activists or loyalists. □□□