

NEWS WRAP

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Western Powers have two separate Forces in Afghanistan, both led by US generals. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is a NATO-led operation, responsible for peacekeeping, stabilization, and counter-insurgency against the Taliban in South Afghanistan. The Combined Joint Task Force 82, under USA's Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), is composed of special forces and elite infantry, who track Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders. Mullah Dadullah, the Taliban military commander was killed in May 07, by Western troops. To refurbish the hydroelectric plant in Kajaki, British-led troops in Helmand province are moving along Sangin valley, with the objective of re-opening the road to Kajaki dam. Discipline and Training are steadily been inculcated on the Afghan army. A number of tribal leaders have stopped supporting the Taliban. More suicide attacks and roadside blasts have been instigated by the Taliban.

But foreign and Afghan forces have killed 230 civilians during January to mid-June 07, in Afghanistan. Since January 06, about 6000 people have died, with about 1500 civilian deaths. The OEF and ISAF depend on air power mostly, to hit their targets. US special forces were fired upon in Khogiani district on 11 June 07. Following air strikes, two enemy positions and a convoy bringing reinforcements were hit. Seven Afghan policemen were killed. On 12 June 07, a US bombing raid on a mosque and 'madrassa' compound in Paktika province, suspected to be an Al-Qaeda hideout, killed the alleged militants, along with seven children. Local Afghans view the US-led aerial bombardments and Taliban suicide-bombings as evil partners. The weakness and corruption of the Afghan government lead to slow reconstruction and problems in nation building. Military command structures are being refurbished as part of "unity of effort", which is USA's latest counter-insurgency doctrine.



Prime Minister Hun Sen's Cambodian government follows an open policy with regard to trade, investment and tourism. Economic growth in Cambodia has been about 11% during the last one year. Education, health services and public finances are steadily improving. In recent years, deaths and disappearances of those who oppose the government, have almost stopped. But graft and other corrupt practices continue, even as an anti-corruption law is likely to be passed shortly, in parliament. A fortnight earlier, foreign governments, multifateral agencies, and charities have decided to grant \$ 690 million to Cambodia, which represents a 15% increase, compared to the previous year. China had joined the annual aid-pledging conference, and its donations have raised the total. The donors were critical of corruption and human-rights abuses. The foreign donors' promised aid is higher than the Cambodian government's annual Tax revenue. The aid would be going directly to the poverty-reducing projects, without transit through government coffers and corrupt officials. China is ready to provide soft loans to Cambodia, without any stipulations. The foreign donors will have less controls, once Cambodia starts earning by oil revenues, over the next few years.



China's middle classes are finding an opportunity to protest through information technology's text messages and internet talks. Internet and mobile phones helped social activists to organize protests against Japan, in Chinese cities, two years ago. There were on-line protests about child labour in Shanxi province in the North, and Henan province in the south. The fathers of abducted boys had posted on-line petitions on 'Tianya', a popular forum for internet discussions, on 07 June 07. On-line protests spread rapidly, and official newspapers published investigative reports on the brutal conditions of the captive labourers, and the indifference of local police. Within a fortnight, hundreds of "slaves" were declared free, and their employers arrested. Initially officials had ignored the use of abducted boys by kiln-owners to perform dangerous work.

Anonymous text messages of late May in Xiamen province, pleaded for rallies outside the headquarters of the city government on 01 June 07, in protest against plans for constructing a chemical factory in the suburbs of Xiamen. The paraxylene plant would cost \$ 1.4 billion. The Text messages warned that the factory could lead to leukaemia and birth deformities, in Xiamen's 2.3 million population. Thousands from China's fast growing middle class, rallied and marched in the protests. Xiamen does not have any past record of protests, but it has a flourishing economy. In March 07, senior academics had submitted to China's parliament that the Taiwanese-owned paraxylene plant be moved away from the residential areas of seaport, Xiamen. Hundreds of Beijing residents had demonstrated in front of the offices of the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA), on 05 June 07. Agitations were around construction plans for a waste-incinerator north-west of Beijing, which could spread toxic chemicals. On 07 June 07, SEPA directed further investigations on Beijing's incinerator project and urban development plans relating to Xiamen.



A study by voluntary groups, called the National Social Watch Coalition, indicates that about 11,500 farmers have committed suicide in India, between 2001 and 2006. The situation has deteriorated in States like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra—the front-runners in capitalist farming. Indebtedness continues indefinitely, as farmers obtain loans to complete crop cycles, but the state and central governments do not show sufficient interest in procurement of food grains. The findings reveal that 434,242 farmer households are trapped in debt, which includes 69,199 in West Bengal and 49,493 in Andhra Pradesh. Most of the suicide deaths of farmers have been caused by indebtedness. □□□