

NEWS WRAP

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Bangladesh still recovering from cyclone Sidr and havocs caused by massive floods, is faced with frequent demands for 1971 war-crimes trial. In efforts to bring corrupt politicians and businessman to trial by civil courts, the army-backed interim government of Bangladesh, since January 07, sidelined the leaders of the two largest political parties, namely Sheikh Hasina Wajed and Khaleda Zia. Campaigners for the Nirmul Committee are demanding the Trial of Motiur Rahman Nizami, the leader of the third largest party, Jamaat-e-Islami. During the nine-month independence war of 1971, that witnessed the conflict between Bengali Speaking East Pakistan and West Pakistan the West Pakistan army appealed for Islamic unity and the support of East Pakistan's fundamentalist parties.

The students wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami became a main source, supporting a pro-army paramilitary organization, *Al Badr*, led by Mr Nijami. Its members killed Bengali speaking Hindus and Muslims, and also abducted and murdered scores of journalists and teachers from colleges and universities. The Bangladesh army would like to rein the powers of Jamaat-e-Islami, and remove the stains of 1971. Civilian distrust of religion politics has created a new unity among the parties. The major political parties have demanded that the government debar "war criminals", from contesting parliamentary elections, due late 2008. With many of the accused and witnesses no more, various citizens' groups are demanding that the state must prosecute the guilty of "war crimes" in court of law or government appointed tribunals.

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During 1974-2005 in real terms food prices fell by three-quarters in the world markets. But in 2007, world wheat prices have doubled, and the prices of other crops like maize, milk and oilseeds, have reached peak levels. In real terms, the prices have jumped by 75% since 2005. The present phenomenon of "agflation" consists of record food prices, in times of abundant food production, and not of scarcity. Total cereal crops in 2007 is expected to be 1.66 billion tonnes in the world, the largest on record, and 89 million tonnes higher than harvests of 2006, which is considered as a bumper crop.

While there has been a slowing of population growth in the world, there has been an inceasing demand for meat in developing countries like India and China, caused by rising wealth. Global GDP is expanding at above 4 percent level, for the fifth successive year. Higher demand for meat increases the demand for cereals, to feed animals. Since 1980, the consumption of cereals has been fixed, while the demand for meat has doubled. The multiplier effects of a shift in diet, has raised demand for cereals which has pushed up prices.

In USA of 2000, 15 million tonnes of maize crop was converted to ethanol, while during 2007, the figure is likely to be about 85 million tonnes. Utilization of maize crop for ethanol, than exports of maize has been a principal reason for increase in grain prices.

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Only 1% of land in West Bengal is "infertile", compared to India's National average of 17%. The total land required for pending projects in West Bengal is 36,437 hectares; whereas West Bengal has only 37,574 hectares of land classified as "barren or uncultivable". Expansion in industrialization in the state, will invariably lead to the acquisition of agricultural land. There is also a shortage of the technologically educated. The Industrial Technology Institutes in West Bengal have only 13,000 odd seats in the higher education institutes; while ITIs in other states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat have more than 85,000 seats.

Rs 56,400 crores of investment in the steel sector of West Bengal, have been announced between January and November 07. The Sajjan Jindal-led JSW Steel is constructing a 10 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) integrated steel plant, along with a captive power plant, at an investment of Rs 35,000 crores, at Salboni (West Midnapore). The project would require 4860 acres of land, of which 4,300 acres are with the state government. Around 750 jobs are promised to the families, who would lose their land. A Videocon Steel project of Rs 15,000 crores at Barboni near Asansol, would have a 3-mtpa steel plant and 1200 mw captive power plant, on 4000 acres. The company has already negotiated prices for 2000 acres with farmers, providing the farmers an option between shares in the company, or cash for their land. The integrated 5-mtpa steel plant of Jai Balaji Steel had Raghunathpur, will also have a 3-mtpa cement plant and 1215 mw power plant, with an investment of Rs 16,000 crores. The company would construct a 500-acre township, on the project area of about 4000 acres. Indian Oil Corporation will spend Rs 3000 crores for expanding capacity at Haldia, from 6 mtpa to 7.5 mtpa. IOC will also install a paraxyline plant in the area, which will feed the neighbouring Mitsubishi Chemical plant. The Tata Motors Small Car Factory will invest over Rs 1000 crores, on the 1000 acres of land, given by the West Bengal government, in Singur. Over 60 vendors are expected to establish units, with an approximate investment of about Rs 500 crores. The land requirement for the RPG Group CESC is about 2000 acres, at Haldia, for setting up a thermal power plant, to produce 2600 mw of power. The investment for this project would be about Rs 10,000 crores. The Indonesian Salim

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