

NEWS WRAP

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A UN body, the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) in a recent report has concluded that there is enough food for everyone, and still more than 800 million people worldwide, go hungry. Malnutrition and food insecurity threatens millions, even though food is cheaper and diets have improved, compared to forty years earlier. Food demand is expected to rise rapidly, with increasing populations and incomes. The huge demand for meat and milk, will compete for land with crops, as well as biofuels. While growing biofuel crops for vehicles threatens world malnutrition, genetically-modified (GM) technology is not an easy solution for feeding the world's hungry. Food shortages, rising prices, and environmental problems have led to food riots and soaring inflation in 80% of the world's countries. Even though investment in agricultural science has decreased, science and technology will have to raise yields and protect soils, water and forests.

The price of oil has hit \$135 a barrel, and the cost of rice, wheat and soya beans are increasing. Rise in food prices has been created by the search for biofuels. Higher oil prices reflect the situation where the world may start running out of crude oil supply. Commodity prices have not been falling, as the short-term effects of a gathering recession are being outstripped by long-term threats to supply. In spite of peak oil production, oil prices are today far higher, than in 2002 (\$70 a barrel). Over the past year, cost of wheat has risen by 75%. Prices have been increasing with the decline in the value of the dollar. Hedge funds have purchased commodities, whenever the dollar has weakened, when the US currency value is falling, and commodities being priced in dollars, producers outside USA increase prices to compensate.

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In September 07, Israel had bombed the site of an alleged nuclear reactor, near al-Kibar, on the banks of the Euphrates river, in eastern Syria. The nuclear site was without protection, and not guarded by any anti-aircraft gun. USA has tried to link the gas-cooled reactors of the Magnox Type which the Kibar construction resembled, as being exclusively built by North Korea, in the last 35 years. Mr Mohamed El Baradei, the director general of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has stated that the Israeli air strike, had undermined "the due process of verification, that is at the heart of the non-proliferation regime". Syria did not agree to a proposed visit by the IAEA to the bombed site, at the end of 2007. USA has been accused by Syria for complicity in the Israeli bombing raid.

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According to a Jammu and Kashmir Police report, 209 Kashmiri Pundits have been killed by militants since 1989, the year of commencement of large scale militancy in Kashmir Valley. Killers in 115 cases remain unidentified or untraced. In courts of law, chargesheets have been filed in 24 cases only. In Kashmir Valley, 140 cases of the murder of Kashmiri Pundits by militants, have been registered at police stations. 31 local militants have been booked by the police for killings in 24 cases, where chargesheets have been filed. Having been involved in the killing of

trade unionist and rights activist H N Wanchoo, three local militants have been convicted. Wanchoo was assassinated at Srinagar's Balgarden in December 1992. All other charge-sheeted militants are out on bail. Prabhavati from Nawagiri, Chadoora (Budgam district) was the first victim of the killings in March 1989. She was killed on Srinagar's Hari Singh High Street. Till date her killers remain untraced. During 1990, there were 109 fatal casualties, of the 209 Kashmiri Pundits killed.

There were gruesome massacres—seven Kashmiri Pundits were killed in March 1997 at Sangrampora village (Budgam), twenty three were killed in Wandhama in Nandimarg in March 2003. Killers of the Wandhama massacre remain untraced. Since 1989, eighty two Kashmiri Pundits were killed in Srinagar city.

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Imposition of the Land Acquisition Act (1894) and the West Bengal Land Requisition and Acquisition Act (1948), which was repealed in 1993, resulted in 47 lac acres of land being acquired in West Bengal, between 1947 and 2000. About 70 lac individuals were affected. 36 lac were displaced, and 34 lac were deprived of livelihood. Numbers displaced and dispossessed by land acquisition exceed those who have benefited from land reforms.

Since the late 1970s in West Bengal, land reforms under 'Operation Barga', had ensured that a share cropper was protected from being evicted by the landowner. Of the 0.3 acre area cultivated by the share cropper, the share cropper was guaranteed a 75% share of the cultivation, which also became a food security for the cultivator. Before the end of 2000, 16.80 lac bargadars were recorded under 'Operation Barga', which accounted for 20.2% of agricultural households in the state. But the benefits of land reforms were short lived for some rural households. Since the 1980s, there has been a steep decline in the recording of bargadars. Pattadars were increasingly alienated from land, and bargadars evicted from areas cultivated. After the commencement of land reforms post-1977, 14.13% of recorded bargadars have been evicted.

Aimed to provide increased livelihood security of rural households, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) offers 100 days of guaranteed employment, to each rural household, in every financial year. Agricultural workers have an alternative source of employment with a comparatively higher rate of wages, under NREGS. Whereas, the exploiting landowning class pay about half the minimum wage. The panchayats in West Bengal are being controlled by the landowning class, irrespective of political affiliation. Against the national average of 42 man days of work created per household, West Bengal has created only 25 man days, followed by Bihar and Nagaland. And the ruling marxists congratulate themselves day in and day out for this brilliant achievement! □□□