# NEWS WRAP
### AGD

Belated by several months, the 2007 US farm bill, was presented to the US Congress, in the third week of May 08. The existing agricultural policy is unjust, and subsidises the "farming" business of prosperous people like David Letterman and David Rockefeller. The new farm bill through a complicated government sponsored insurance, counter-cyclical assistance, disaster relief aid, and legacy payments without collaterals, offers $307 billion to wealthy farm households. The only restriction on the subsidies is a "means test", that is applicable to couples earning in excess of $1.5 million annually. Through overlapping accounts, competent accountants could even avoid this. Rich farmers have been guaranteed high incomes, by linking future subsidy payments to current record commo-dity prices. According to the US Agricultural Department, commercial farm households which benefits the maximum from the generous offers, would be expected to obtain average income of $229, 920 in 2008. As and when prices fall again, the US government could owe billions in subsidy payments to such wealthy farmers.

The farm bill guarantees 85% of the domestic sugar market to American sugar producers. Consumers would be forced to pay an extra $2 billion annually in higher sugar prices, and US federal offers would be paying $1.3 billion over ten years. There could be fresh international trade disputes over the bill. Brazil may move a World Trade Organiza-tion law suit, over restrictions to ethanol, produced from sugar cane. A rule continues where the US government is required to purchase all foreign food assistance, from American farmars, and transport food aid on American ships. Since the 1990s, the purchasing power of food stamps has declined. A programme contained in the farm bill, promises support for food stamps.Largesse has been given to fruit and nut growers, and tax breaks have been promised to the race horse industry.

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The indigenous population in South Africa is 48 million, of which 38 million are black and the rest being of white, Indian and mixed-race descent. The 3 million to 5 million immigrants are illegal, without work permits, and survive on the fringe economy. Workers from Lesotho, Malwai or Zimbabwe have been long employed in South African mines and farms. In the 1980s, thousands of refugees came to South Africa from the war in Mozambique. As apartheid ended and South Africa became exposed internationally, immigration to South Africa increased significantly. Several million Zimbabweans, north of the Limpopo river, have escaped from the fighting and repression in Zimbabwe. Refugees from other African states have been seeking political asylum in South Africa. Qualified Zimbabwean teachers and doctors have been working as gardners or waiters. Many immigrants have unlicensed street corner shops, or they peddle their wares on the streets. About 15% of small, unlicensed businesses in Gauteng province are run by foreigners.

Fierce attacks on immigrants, started in Alexandra, an overcrowed Johannesburg township, on 11 May 08; and spread to townships and settlements

around the suburbs of Johannesburg, and even parts of the city. About 20,000 people have been evicted, and robbed of household goods. Over 70 people have been killed, and many foreigners have been burnt alive. Thousands of displaced foreigners from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi, are camping at police stations. Angry local residents accuse the foreigners of stealing jobs and houses, and of being criminals, in an atmosphere of rising food and fuel prices and continued unemployment and poverty. Vendas and Shanyaans, representing smaller ethnic groups have also been targeted. Police have arrested hundreds of suspected rioters, besides firing rubber bullets at mobs armed with machetes, guns and iron bars. President Thabo Mbeki has deployed the army. While xenophobic violence has been recurrent in South Africa, the scale of the anti-foreigner violence has been unprecedented. A panel has been set up to find out who are creating the attacks on migrants. Many immigrants have been arrested and deported. Those from Zimbabwe find it impossible to qualify as an asylum seeker. Without any valid papers and in fear of the police, the immigrants from Zimbabwe often live on wages below the legal minimum.

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Since mid May 08, Jean Dreze, the development econmist and his colleague, Lalit Mehta of the Vikas Sahyog Kendra, an NGO, had been conducting a social audit on the National Rural Employment Gurantee (NREG) Scheme in Chatarpur block of Palamau (Jharkhand State). Two days after Lalit Mehta had done a social audit of a pond project, being dug by the forest department, his body was found on 16 May 08. Several irregularities in implementa-tion of the NREG scheme have surfaced, in the audit that Dreje's team undertook in the Rs 5 lacs pond project in Chatarpur, after Lalit Mehta's murder. At the work sites, muster rolls were not kept, and job cards were not updated. Payments under NREG were not paid to the workers regularly. The team found only eight workers at the site, visited on 17 May 08, while the muster roll contained 108 names. Comparison of signatures obtained by members of the team at the site, with the samples maintained by the forest department, point to large scale forgery of the signatures of the  workers. The master roll contained the signature of Urmila Devi in Hindi, whereas she is an illiterate, who could not sign. Signatures of dozens of residents who had migrated from the village, and had not returned, were maintained in the registers of the forest department.

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After the recently concluded panchayat polls in West Bengal, the Left Front has urged the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattarcharjee to move cautiously while acquiring land for industry. Notices have been issued by the state government for acquiring 500 acres for a shipyard project at Geokhali, near Nandigram, where the left front has suffered major reverses in the recent local body polls. For the Kukrahati Rajarhat Expressway and for proposed chemical hub around Haldia, land acquisition would be necessary. And the left is caught in a bind! □□□