

NEWS WRAP

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Till 2005, Mauritania experienced the brutal rule of President Maaouya Ould Sid' Ahmed Taya, which had lasted for two decades. Following the coup of 2005, the army removed Taya. A protagonist of the 2005 coup, President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdal-lahi was made the President. There was another coup in Mauritania, an Islamic republic in north-west Africa, in August 08. Prior to the coup, one government was dismissed, and another forced to resign. Rising food prices had gone beyond control, and there was lack of transparency in the finances of Mrs Abdal-lahi, the president's wife. The army had propelled a mass resignation of the President's supporters in Parliament, about a week before the coup. On the morning of the coup, President Abdal-lahi had issued orders for the military dismissal of senior army officers.

Without any gunfire, President Abdal-lahi was put under arrest by the presidential guard, and relieved of his duties on 06 Aug. 08. The head of the presidential guard, Mohammad Ould Abdelaziz had led the coup. He was one of the officers, the ousted President had tried to dismiss. After the coup of 2005, the new junta had rapidly conducted elections which brought Abdal-lahi to power in 2007. He was the first democratically elected president since 1960, when Mauritania became independent. The government of Abdal-lahi was a valuable friend of USA in the "war on terror" in Africa. Al-Qaeda has claimed several attacks in Mauritania over the last one year. Following the August 08 coup, the USA and the African Union have demanded the immediate restoration of the former president Abdal-lahi. Nigeria has not recognized the post-coup leaders. The European Union have threatened suspension of aid to Mauritania. Early elections have been promised by the coup leaders.

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The spectacular Beijing Olympics Opening ceremony was directed by the illustrious film maker Zhang Yimou. One early sequence of the impressive fireworks, was actually created by using digitally enhanced computer graphics, for "theatrical effect". The 56 smiling children who paraded cheerfully in the Bird's Nest stadium were Han Chinese, who comprise more than 90% of China's 1.3 billion population. Though the children were dressed in brightly coloured cultural costumes, there were no Uighurs, no Zhuangs, No Huis, No Tujias, No Mongols, and No Tibetans. There was too much risk that even a child could make an unacceptable gesture. Liu Yan, 26 years old, a leading dancer who was injured in a rehearsal for the opening ceremony, could be paralysed, below the waist, for life. Lin Miaoke, aged nine, who performed 'ode to the motherland', was miming the voice of another little girl, Yang Peiyi, aged seven, whose crooked teeth did not impress a Politburo member.

Despite the disappointments amongst sports lovers in not being able to purchase a ticket for the Olympic games, many seats were vacant at the tightly secured Olympic complex, whether at the swimming pools or at the other sports venues.

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The West Bengal government has directed churches to hand over excess land held, flouting land ceiling norms. The land ceiling rules stipulate that an organization cannot hold over 7.5 acres in urban areas, and 24.20 acres in other areas. Under the provisions of land ceiling rules, the state has started acquiring 60 acres from the Methodist Church in Asansol, 21 acres from the Baptist Union Church in Midnapore, 21 acres from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Purulia, and 14 acres from the Church of North India in Jiagunge, Murshidabad. The Seventh Day Adventist Church at Falakata in Jalpaiguri, runs a school for poor children on 375 acres. The school has been informed by the government that it can keep only 24 acres. The Church received instructions two years ago, but feels that the compensation was far from adequate. Subject to cabinet approval, an organization can possess excess land, in special cases like setting up an industry, or for implementing a development project. The land with Churches is generally received as donations from Christian missionaries. The cultivation of paddy, dairy farming, and pisciculture on Church land forms a main source of income for the Churches.

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CPI(M) cadres in West Bengal are on the defensive as a consequence of opposition by farmers to acquisition of agricultural land for industry, and the recent reverses in the rural polls. There has been a freeze in industrial investment in the state. A multi-lane highway, connecting Kolkata airport to Haldia is on hold. The projected investment in the Barasat-Raichak expressway, and other related projects accompanying it was estimated at Rs 40,000 crore, over a period of ten years, by the Salim Group (Indonesia). The chemical hub in Nandigram has been abandoned, in the face of violent protests. Huge investments and environmental clearances involved would create serious obstacles for relocating the chemical hub to Nayachar, protests over land acquisition have resulted in a giant power plant, planned in Katwa (Bardhaman district) to be shelved for the time being. There are no indications to any sanctions to the proposed DLF township in Dankuni, over an area of nearly 4500 acres, and an investment exceeding Rs 30,000 crore.

The Trinamul Congress has demanded return of land (305 acres), in Singur. There are pieces of land scattered across the Tata small car project, and not feasible for return. Ancillary units, spread over 290 acres are an integral part of the project plan. Besides the Supreme Court has ruled that any land acquired for a public purpose, cannot be returned to the previous owner. □□□