

NEWS WRAP

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Iraq's leading cardiac clinic was burnt down, after the US-led invasion in 2003. Operation facilities for Iraqi babies, with congenital heart problems, are not available in Iraq. Necessary treatment in the Arab world, could cost around \$ 15,000, for heart surgery in private clinics. Tel Aviv offers free life-saving hole-in-the-heart surgery. Parents of Iraqi babies with heart problems, have been indoctrinated to believe that Israel is their mortal enemy. They refuse to travel to Israel for free medical facilities. Some who have accepted offers of free medical treatment in Tel Aviv, never disclose where their children were treated. A stigma continues over medical treatment in Israel.

Iraqi children have undergone successful operations at the Edith Wolfson medical centre in Tel Aviv. Surgeries are sponsored by *Save a Child's Heart* (SACH), a humanitarian organization, founded in Israel in 1996. Private sources, including Christian groups, have been supporting the organization. Some Iraqi Parents are taking their children to Algeria for cardiac operations, where the Algerian government is providing free treatment to a limited number of children.

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Eager to purchase Africa's oil and metals, over the last eighteen months, China and India have hosted lavish African summits. Japan has been buying much of its requirements of rare metals like copper, nickel, tungsten, from China. Safeguarding its own supplies, China has reduced exports of metals. In the last week of May 08, Japan hosted the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which is a quadrennial event, commencing 1993. About forty African heads of state or government attended, along with Bono, the pop singer. Aid for Africa became secondary to Japan's hunt for natural resources. Africa's resources were to be harnessed by Japanese Technology, keeping Africa's best interests at heart.

Japan promised to double aid to Africa by 2012, raising it to \$ 3.4 billion. Easing rules against lending to countries provided debt relief earlier, Japan agreed to provide \$ 4 billion, in low interest loans. Japan looks forward to Africa's support, for a permanent Japanese seat in the UN security council. Japanese loans are never linked to improvement in governance or human rights, unlike those from Europe.

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Nepal remains a diverse country, even after Prithvi Narayan Shah's merger of sixty principalities in 1768. The Nepalese elected government raised the national flag at the palace of dethroned King Gyanendra on 29 May 08. With the lowering of the royal flag from Nepal's palace and the abolition of the 239-year-old Hindu monarchy; the Himalayan Nation became a republic. From August '06 to July '07, Nepal's economic growth has been 2.3%, compared with 3.1% the year earlier. Tourists, who contribute significantly to income, have started returning, after the end of the war between the royalist army and the Maoists. Foreign aid and remittances from abroad fuel the economy, and business is yet to grow noticeably. The new government is faced with the problems of revival of industry,

frequent labour strikes, and scarcity of fuel and power supply. 80% of the 26 million population of Nepal live on farms. In their election manifesto, the Maoists had promised land to the landless farmers and jobs to the unemployed youth. Thousands of ex-Maoist fighters still live in camps, and they insist on integration into the military. The move for induction into army ranks is being opposed by the army, traditionally having royalist sympathies.

Though the Maoists are the biggest party in Nepal, it does not have a majority. They would like to widen the disparate coalition, by including the regional parties from the south and south east. The leader of the Maoists, Prachanda, may be reluctant to grant wider regional autonomy to parties of the south and south east. With a slower rate of growth, the Maoists may find it difficult to push through land reforms, emancipation of lower castes, and higher foreign investment.

Along the India-Nepal border in Pithoragarh district, there have been several clashes between the Youth Communist League, a Maoist outfit, and the people who traditionally collect the medicinal herb, Yarsa Gambu. Herb collectors in India visit their properties in Nepal. As tension prevails, Maoist leaders have threatened to blow up the Sita bridge, connecting India and Nepal. The medicinal herb, provides a livelihood to the herb collectors. These herb collectors face demands for money from the YCL, in the shape of tax. The YCL members physically assault the herb collectors, when they refuse to pay. Under the 1950 India-Nepal Friendship Treaty, the right to free trade, has been given to nationals of both the countries. Many Indians visit the Appy region in Nepal, where they own immovable property. Violence could escalate along the Dharchula border of Pithoragarh district, as YCL leaders like Dharm Sing and Manju Bomb, beat up Indians visiting Appy region. There is no police post in the border area, and ITBP personnel have been deployed for security.

Yarsa Gambu is a medicinal herb, grown in the upper Himalayas, and harvested during May and June, only. Exported to China, it is sold for Rs 3.25 lacs per kg. The incredible price of the herb has showered prosperity on the region. Violence is latent as the stakes are high. During the Yarsa Gambu harvest season of 2007, there were similar clashes. The Uttarakhand state government had authorized the Kumaon Manal Vikas Nigam and the forest panchayats to purchase the herb.

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