

NEWS WRAP

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Once under the control of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Jaffna has been under the control of the Sri Lankan army, since the past thirteen years. Connecting the Tamil heartland to the Sinhala-speaking South is the A-9 highway, which has been closed from August 2006, ever since Sri Lanka's civil war escalated. Crossing Wannai, the stronghold of the rebel LTTE, the A-9 highway touches Kilinochchi, the administrative headquarters of the LTTE. The Sri Lankan army is now about a mile away from Kilinochchi, following ferocious fighting in the Wannai area. The Sri Lankan army's victorious onslaught offers hope to Jaffna's 600,000 Tamils, that the A-9 highway will reopen. The northern peninsula could be free from isolation and economic stagnation, which have built up over several years. Shortages of fuel, food and electricity would no longer afflict Jaffna. Once a centre of Tamil scholarship and culture, Jaffna, today, is a battle field of bombed homes and bullet hit temples. People in Jaffna have suffered massacres and forced displacement. Locals now hope that peace would return. All along the LTTE have attempted to monopolize Tamil political representation.

India has been involved in the Sri Lankan war, and providing military assistance to the island government. Radars have been supplied by India to Sri Lanka, and defence personnel have been despatched to render assistance to the Sri Lankan military. Financial loans have been extended by India to the island government. Agreement exists between the Indian and Sri Lankan Navies for sharing intelligence. Personnel from the Sri Lankan army and air force are being trained in India. Political leaders in India believe that the Indian government had encouraged the Sri Lankan government to initiate a military offensive. Members of parliament and political leaders in Tamil Nadu have been calling for a halt to military aid to the Sri Lankan government, and a ceasefire in the island nation.



Albania wishes to join the NATO and the European Union. In March 08, a stockpile of artillery shells blew up near Tirana airport, killing 26 people, including children, and injuring more than 250. A majority of the victims of the explosion were workers of Albademil, a local contractor, employed by an American firm, for selling ammunition to the new Afghan army. At the time of the explosion, some workers were re-packaging 40-year-old Chinese manufactured shells, to conceal their origin, as US military contractors are prohibited from dealing in Chinese equipments. Other labourers were removing gunpowder and detonators from dud shells, to obtain metal casings for scrap sale.

Albania's economy has been growing by 6% a year, agriculture reviving and foreign investment flowing in. Neglected oilfields are being explored by a Canadian company.



The Right to Information Act (RTI) though three years old, has failed to keep pace with the significant awareness of rural India, as per a series of preliminary findings of a participatory exercise, undertaken by the Right to Information Assessment and Analysis Group (RAAG) and the National Campaign for People's Right to Information. The weak RTI infrastructure is burdened with Public Information Officers (PIOs) being unaware of their roles. Half the PIOs in rural India are not aware that they were PIOs. They lack training and are unfamiliar with the law. About a third of the PIOs do not have a copy of the RTI Act. More men than women are using the RTI in rural areas. Rajasthan is the best

RTI performer. Meghalaya does not have any PIOs at the village level.

Tata Motors has relocated the Nano car plant from Singur to Sanand, 35 km west of Ahmedabad and airport, close to a highway connecting Mumbai and Delhi, in proximity to proposed Dholera port, and 225 km away from Rajkot which is a major ancillary hub. The 1100 acres tract for the mother plant and ancillary units, was earlier a cattle farm for Anand Agricultural University. The decision to shift from Singur was an outcome of prolonged agitation by unwilling farmers who were reluctant to give up land. The agitation by landowners, farmers and sharecroppers was led by Mamata Banerjee and the Trinamul Party, with alleged suggestions of being financed by some vested interests. Tatas had invested about Rs 1500 crore in Singur. The bulk investment of plants and machinery could be moved from Singur, and transported to Sanand. The losses for the West Bengal government total about Rs 300 crore in Singur, covering investments for dredging and widening of canals covering a 20 sq km area to prevent the Nano project site being flooded during rains, for construction of bridges and culverts; for construction of an electricity power sub station; for erection of a training centre and a market complex; and for the construction of new roads. The taxpayers will shoulder the burden.

The Gujarat government owns the land which has been given to Tata Motors at Sanand. When the larger part of India and Gujarat were reeling under famine in 1899, the land was gifted by the British for setting up a cattle farm. The erstwhile Bombay state had entered an agreement with the farmers and the rulers of the princely state of Sanandkoth to acquire the land for cattle grazing and conservation. The land was taken by the state government, after independence.

Departure of Tatas from Singur has also resulted in the abandonment of the principles of corporate social responsibility in south Bengal. Along with the Nano project, Tata Motors was pursuing the economic, social and community development of Singur region. The union government's proposed rehabilitation and resettlement (R and R) of displaced farmers Bill of 2007, requires agricultural land of equal measure to be provided to farmers, whose land has been acquired. In the alternative, they have to be provided 750 days of wages at the rate of minimum agricultural wage, @ of Rs 75 perday. The West Bengal government has provided neither at Singur. However, Rs 5 lac over and above the market rate has been provided for every acre of land acquired. Less than 1% of adults in affected families have received technical training. □□□