

NEWS WRAP

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The economic downturn in USA has hit hardest the Hispanic Nations. While the US National unemployment rate is 6.5% the unemployment rate among all Hispanics has risen to 8.8% in Oct. 08. The unemployed rate of Hispanic immigrants was 7.5% in Jan.-March 08, and is expected to be worse at the beginning of 2009, though there has been a decline in the number of Hispanic immigrants. Compared to 2006, the number of Mexican citizens who left Mexico to live abroad, decreased more than 40% this year, according to Mexican government statistics. The American Border Patrol has caught 18% fewer people in the US fiscal year, concluded in Sep.08, compared to the earlier fiscal year. Immigrant workers could earn up to \$1000 a week, on busy construction sites, during south Florida's building boom. Now the South Florida construction industry has suffered the biggest labour crunch. The building industry currently employs only 135,000 workers compared to 165,000 at the building boom peak in 2006. As new building construction grinds to a halt, the number of disappearing jobs is expected to increase. According to Mexico's central bank, over 20% of Mexican migrants in USA are employed in building construction.

A severe fall in remittances by migrant communities has been noticed by money-transfer companies. Since 2000, the growth in cash sent home from USA has fallen to the lowest in 2007, as per data with Inter-American Development Bank. While remittances to Mexico has risen by 17% in 2006 to \$23.7 billion, such remittances grew by only 1% in 2007. The decline in remittances could be 7 to 8% in 2008, as per calculations by Mexico's central bank. Communities in Mexico, who are most dependent on foreign remittances, are suffering from the set-back effects. A determined crackdown on undocumented workers by US immigration officials is adding to the acute difficulties of lack of jobs. Recession in the US economy will bring difficult times to migrant labour.

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18 Dec. 08 was the 30th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's launching China into extraordinary economic development. But recent weeks have seen violent strikes and protests almost daily throughout China. Electricity production for industry fell by 4% in Oct. 08, the first time it has declined in a decade. Millions of workers have lost their jobs. A deceleration in China's growth rate is not unlikely. But China's capitalism and state domination may achieve about 8% GDP growth in 2009. Provinces in China are in the course of their own \$1.4 trillion bailout plan, which depends on a massive infrastructure-building spree, designed to propel the economy. Growth in China would be boosted by changing demographics, the adoption of new technology from developed countries, and rapid industrialization. China could suffer from a sharp decline in exports. Hundreds of thousands of workers are losing jobs in sectors where tough labour laws have been designed to decelerate production of lower value added goods.

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Evidence has emerged that Pakistan's ISI and Lashkar-e-Toiba were behind the 26 Nov. 08 terror strikes in Mumbai. Also failure of intelligence and security

systems pre-cipitated the Mumbai terror attacks. The terrorists who attacked Mumbai had entered the city from the sea. As a follow-up measure, the union government of India has decided to make it mandatory for owners of all motorized boats, to get the boats registered with an agency, to be designated by the respective state governments. The Indian Coast Guards and other agencies res-ponsible for preventing a breach of the maritime waters, are now empowered to hire boats for patrolling. Acute shortage of speed boats presently severely hamper patrolling operations of the Coast Guards and other agencies. The implementation of the road map, finalized in 2006, to protect coastal areas from incursion, was never implemented for lack of funds and dearth of interest amongst state governments. A majority of the states had not achieved even 50% of the targets set under the protection of coastal areas plan. The 2006 Plan had envisaged the creation of 49 new coastal police stations in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, setting up of 80-odd coastal check points; procuring over 1000 fibre glass boats, and over 100 speed boats. The state governments explain that new coastal police stations could not be set up due to inadequacy of funds provided by the central government. The West Bengal government has cited the non-availability of land for not being able to raise the proposed coastal police stations.

In the first week of December 08, Maoists of Jharkhand raised a gun salute in the dense forests of Latehar, expressing solidarity with the Mumbai terror victims and security personnel. The non-parliamentary Maoists indicated that their violence was different from the *jihadis*. The Maoists have specific targets and function according to a programme, without aiming gunfire against innocent citizens. The gun salute is a sharp departure from the Maoists treating the Indian state as people's enemy.

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Even with India's Tri-colour flag on the moon, a huge population in India is socially unprotected, and by-passed by the growth process. The Report of the National Commission of Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (August 2007) points to 77% of Indians living on Rs 20 a day. The working conditions of the unorganized workers is abysmal, as they have no water, no sanitation and no electricity. The 77% of the cited population consist of the poorest, and also include the deprived social groups like the Muslims, Dalits and Other Backward Castes. □□□