

# NEWS WRAP

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Communism came to Cuba, fifty years ago, when Fidel Castro took power. USA persists with an economic embargo against Cuba, and under the Helms-Burton act has been trying to obstruct Cuba's trade with other countries, in contravention of international law. This is continuing even though USA has been trading with communist regimes in China and Vietnam for decades. In September 08, hurricanes Gustav and Ike thrashed into western Cuba, causing \$ 10 billion worth of damages, in the shape of smashed electricity power lines, disruption of the state-run food supply Network, and devastated farm lands. The debris was cleared in days, and power lines restored in six weeks, by military. Most of the slammed houses have been repaired by emergency brigades. New vegetable plots cultivated on unused land have led to food supply reaching near normal. The vital tobacco crop harvest displays quick recovery. However, the irreparable hurricane damages, the rising cost of food imports, and the collapse of the world market price of nickel (Cuba's main export) points to economic growth of only 4.3% for 2008-09.

The Cuban economy has been hit badly by the rise in global commodity prices. Cuba's trade deficit has increased in 2008-09 by 70%, to more than \$ 11 billion. Every year Cuba imports 80% of its food, at a cost of \$ 2.5 billion. Cuba receives \$ 7.8 billion annually for "export services" of doctors and sports trainers, sent to Venezuela in exchange for oil which partially covers the huge trade deficit. In Nov08, Cuba was admitted into the Rio Group of nations. 40,000 hectares of soya would be planted by Brazil. Year 2009 would be marked by official visits from the presidents of Mexico and Chile. Some 74,000 petitions have been received, against a plan to redistribute idle state land of about 700,000 hectares total, to more productive private peasant farmers. Broader economic reforms are steadily stepping in. Cuba's National Assembly has recently raised the retirement age by five years; to 60 years for women and 65 years for men. State salaries are expected to be reviewed, with higher salary for more productive workers.

Guatemala was the first victim of the cold war in South America. Jacobo Arbenz, a democratic social reformer in Guatemala was dislodged from power by an invasion organized by the Eisenhower US administration in 1954, in the name of anti-communism. Cuba's communism has out-last-ed the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which earlier provided net subsidies of about \$ 2 billion a year. New allies have developed in Latin America and other parts of the globe. Foreign investment in mass tourist industry and remittances from Cubans abroad are legalized. Family run small businesses are allowed.

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Fudging of accounts at Satyam Computer Services has resulted in a fraud of Rs 8000 crores. The union government has on 08 Jan 09 ordered for an inspection into eight of Satyam's subsidiaries, and has asked the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) to vet the internal audit documents of the IT major. But corporate swindlers are faster than the law. About 14% of the total corporate violations in India are of a serious gravity, involving public interest. Such cases relate to non-banking finance companies, chit funds, plantation companies, violations referred to serious Frauds Investigation Office, vanishing companies which have adversely affected the interest of investors and other stake holders, listed companies, enterprises involved in securities scam and other miscellaneous discrepancies which the government considers unfit for withdrawal. UK, US, Germany, France and Singapore have a conviction rate of about 65%. The conviction rate ranges from 10 to 18% in South Asia. As per parliamentary records, the conviction rate in India is an alarming 5% only.

Available statistics point a huge number of pending cases in India for several years. Since even initial service of summons has not been possible in a large number of cases, the launching of prosecution in such cases is infructuous. The investigative agencies are untrained to probe corporate frauds. Computer forensic expertise is also lacking.

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Chattisgarh and Orissa are boosting campaigns against Maoists "for peace in the state". In spite of criticism from the Indian home ministry, over the Salwa Judum campaign, the Chattisgarh state government continues to provide protection to tribals, involved in the "anti-Maoist" movement,

in the state. Even though the union home ministry considers the 'Salwa Judum' as state sponsored, the Chattisgarh state government considers it as a "mass movement of tribals against Maoists". Ultra-left extremism is spread in Chattisgarh far and wide. The "integrated action plan", to counter terrorism and Maoism in Chattisgarh, includes setting up of two batallions of Combat Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) by the union government in the state.

To a varying degree, 17 out of 30 districts in Orissa are affected by left wing extremist violence. The Orissa state government is planning to set up a Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare Training Centre near Bhubaneshwar, in order to counter the growing spread of Maoists in the state. One COBRA battalion will be at Koraput. Six more CRPF battalions are expected to be deployed in the affected districts. There are also platitudes on the socio-economic development of the Maoist-affected areas. Andhra Pradesh is the only state, which has not yet sought any support from the union government, to tackle Maoism. The West Bengal state government is also seeking the establishment of a jungle warfare training school in the state. The union government has assured the states for increasing the training capacity for security personnel and equipping the policemen in special tactics and skills.

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Scarcely any of the revolutionary groups in the last fifty years of pre-independence, could conduct more than one operation against British rule in India. Contrastingly, intelligence agencies in India have failed to anticipate most of the bomb bursts and gun fire that caused destruction in Indian cities, over the past four years. The Intelligence Bureau preoccupies itself disseminating useless political intelligence, instead of focusing on security threats. The dossier on the Mumbai attack (Nov 08) has been prepared with huge help from US Federal Bureau of Intelligence. □□□