

NEWS WRAP

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With the dismemberment of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the bonds between the countries stretching from Slovenia to Macedonia had snapped. Now steadily the bonds and ties are being restored, and Yugosphere is emerging, with shared experience in business and trade. Most Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Croats speak the same language with minor variations. Macedonians and Slovenes understand Serbo-Croat as a second language. Using their identity cards, people can travel freely within most of the region. The Regional Co-Operation Council in Sarajevo is trying to consolidate what the people of the region have in common. Soldiers of the different countries who were antagonistic to each other, are presently training together. Firemen are co-operating on a routine basis, and a south-east European Fire-fighting Centre, as part of the Regional Co-Operation Council, is being installed in Sarajevo. Experts like doctors, vets and central bankers are meeting regularly.

In spite of political, religious and ethnic differences, the people of former Yugoslavia are fond of the same music and similar food. Every summer there is a large gathering at the Exit music festival in Novi Sad in Serbia, where big musicians from across the region, perform. There has been a drop amongst those who want to emigrate in every state of the West Balkans. About a third of Montenegro's trade is with Serbia. Bosnia is the largest export market for Serbia and Croatia. Macedonia and Serbia have wide trade relations. Supermarkets, chocolate spread companies and newspapers treat the region as one. Criminals used to trade guns and cigarettes across the front lines, during the Yugoslav wars. With territories and refugees no longer an issue, the locals oppose informal trade barriers. Slovene milk is more popular than Italian milk in Kosovo. Kosovars are trading with Serbia, and prefer holidays in Montenegro. But in football, the Bosnian Serbs support Serbia's national football team, the Bosnian croats support Croatia, and the Bosnian Muslims support Bosnia.

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Banking frauds in India, are noticeable in traditional areas, as also in new areas like housing loans, credit cards, internet banking and out-sourcing business. The economic slowdown of 2008-2009, led to certain internal controls getting relaxed due to the exigency of credit expansion. On 01 April 09, there were 23,914 bank fraud cases, involving Rs 1883 crore. During 2008-09 there were 212 bank frauds, amounting to Rs 1404 crores. 102 unscrupulous borrowers perpetrated frauds exceeding Rs 25 lac, each. Builders, warehouse owners, chartered accountants, lawyers and valuers of property do not have any contractual relationship with banks.

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Certain leaders and activists of the Salwa Judum counter insurgency campaign, which the Chattisgarh government has promoted with the Indian Central government's support, are alleged to be guilty of various crimes against the tribal population of Bastar, including murder, rape and arson. Many of the allegations were corroborated by the National Human Rights Commission, and hence the Supreme Court had asked the Chattisgarh authorities to investigate and punish

the perpetrators. The Chattisgarh state government, on 20 Aug 09, filed a long awaited reply in an on-going public interest litigation case against Salwa Judum, in the Supreme Court. On the basis of statements from the prime accused, viz Ismail Khan, Boddu Raja, Soyam Mukka and Dinesh Maurya, the police have dismissed complaints of rape as “entirely false”. In the case of rape victim, Ms M, the police maintain that she has left her village and her whereabouts are not known; whereas two days before the police report, the victim had appeared before a magistrate. Police state that when Salwa Judum volunteers visit villages in public awareness missions, false complaints of robbery and rape are raised against Salwa Judum.

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The dry weather spell has affected all the north east states. Eventhough the National Drought Prone Area does not cover Assam, and only extends to Karbi Anglong District as a rain scarce area, fourteen districts in Assam have been developed “drought affected”, where the rain fall deficit is about 24%. Assam’s agricultural output is expected to fall by 20%. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur are facing “drought like” situations. Areas under the Bodoland Territorial Council have suffered rainfall deficit of more than 60%, affecting 68,000 hectares of rice crop. The adverse effects on Assam’s semi-aquatic rice crops is bound to be severe. The yield of ‘boro’ rice (summer paddy) has been lower due to the moisture stress of March-April months. Assam’s rice production and rural economy depends on ‘sali’ (winter paddy) transplantation. Though 95% of ‘sali’ has been planted, the crop requires a well distributed rainfall and “flood free” season. Shortfall in rains creates reduced ‘sali’ output. A ‘food security’ problem could arise in the north east, as Assam’s rice yield feeds the neighbouring states. The proplonged dry spell will affect tea quality, tea taste, tea plant quality and the productive life of a tea bush. Tea production costs will rise consequent to frequent tea bush replanting. There will be small harvests in jute following drought and insufficient rain water storage. □□□