

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Raoul Wallenberg, a diplomat from Sweden, had saved thousands of Jews from the Nazi gas chambers, during the Second World War. Danish Jews were sheltered by Sweden. An article claiming that Israeli soldiers had harvested the organs of some Palestinians, who were shot, has been published in 'Aftonbladet', a Swedish tabloid on 17 Aug '09. Within hours of publication of the incendiary article, Israel's deputy foreign minister had denounced the article for racism. Israeli authorities demanded that it be condemned by the Swedish government. But the Swedish prime minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt defended freedom of expression.

Boycott of Swedish companies, including IKEA and Volvo, has been demanded in internet campaigns from Israel. Law suits against the Swedish tabloid are being pursued. Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accused Sweden of blood libel and anti-semitism. Sweden is approaching the end of its six-month presidency of the European Union. Earlier Sweden had described the eviction of Palestinian families in east Jerusalem as illegal, under international law.

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For the past eighty years, Turkey's fourteen million odd Kurds have been brutally repressed, jailed or killed. The outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was launched in 1984. Terrorist campaigns have seen the loss of over 40,000 lives, many of them PKK fighters. The Turkish state has spent billions of dollars, in countering the PKK rebellions, besides raising hurdles in becoming a full fledged democracy. In early August '09, Turkey's prime minister met Ahmet Turk, the leader of the long ignored Democratic Society (DTP), the largest Kurdish party, and considered PKK's political front.

A ground breaking plan would ease remaining bans on Kurdish broadcasting, allow Turkified villages to re-establish their Kurdish names, adopt Kurdish language and literature departments in schools and universities, and repeal of laws under which young Kurds are jailed for allegedly acting for the PKK. Local prosecutors are discovering the remains of victims of the once rampant "mystery murders", conducted by fanatical members of Turkey's security forces.

The withdrawal of US troops is persuading Iraqi Kurds to pursue peace and protection with Turkey. Iraqi Kurds are willing to place limits on the movements of around 3000 to 5000 PKK fighters based in Kirkuk area of Northern Iraq and steadily repatriate them to Turkey, under a negotiated amnesty.

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Kerala produces about six lac tons of rice every year, and its intake of rice annually is about thirty lac tons. Over 70% of the rice grown in the west Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh is sold in Kerala. When rice from Andhra Pradesh is unavailable in the market, rice varieties produced in Tamil Nadu are sold in Kerala. Andhra Pradesh's late chief minister Y S Rajasekhara Reddy's initiatives had ensured the settlements of disputes between the Andhra Civil Supplies Corporation and millers in west Godavari district. Kerala is particularly fond of the 'Jaya' rice variety, even at a steep price of Rs 24 per kilo. Millers in Andhra Pradesh are now being allowed a choice of their buyers, whether export or domestic. The Kerala state-run distribution sources supply the Irri-1001 and the Swarna rice varieties from left-ruled West Bengal, at Rs 14 to Rs 16 per kilo, in spite of the high transportation costs involved.

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The West Bengal Cabinet Standing Committee on Industry had approved an Information Technology (IT) project at Rajarhat on 20 Feb 08. On 03 April 09, the state IT department has signed MOUs with Infosys and Wipro, for 90 acres a piece at Rajarhat. Following recession, Infosys wanted to go slow on the project, even though Weben Akash IT Links pvt Ltd disclosed details of 90 acres allotted to Infosys on 27 May 09. Rajarhat had offered an alternative model for direct land purchase by private investors. It was earlier decided that Akash Nirman would acquire 1200 acres in Rajarhat. The government would be given 600 acres free. IT majors like Wipro, Infosys and TCS would be sold the land by the state government. The government would have been spending about Rs 760 crores on infrastructure. The state government had also joined hands with Vedic Realty to develop an integrated IT township, covering over 1600 acres.

Gaffar Mollah and other goons grabbed land in Rajarhat and Bhangar, proclaiming support from the CPI(M), BJP, Trinamul Congress and the police. The Bhangar-Rajarhat Development

Authority (BRDA) and other committees were formed for evolving political consensus and finding livelihood for landlosers. Soon the advisory facilitation committees became syndicates, who supplied construction materials for projects in the area. Much of the land for Vedic Village and Rajarhat IT township was being obtained by bullying land owners, sometimes at gun point. A road would be built across a reluctant farmer's land, and thereafter sand and bricks would be dumped, making the land unfit for farming. Frequently weapons would be brandished; and a huge quantity of weapons was being stockpiled at Vedic Village Resorts.

On 23 Aug 09, an offside ruling at a local football match, led to shooting, which killed a teenager. A mob of 700 villagers invaded Vedic Village, and torched the resort. Villagers have been complaining that land was forcibly occupied. The IT township land mutation was stalled on 01 Sep 09. The West Bengal Government scrapped the IT township project at Rajarhat on 07 Sep 09. Prospects of a cumulative investment of Rs 1000 crore and 10,000 jobs have reached a dead end. Within the last year, Tata Motors have pulled out from Singur, and DLF abandoned Dankuni. □