

NEWS WRAP

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In an era in which antiretroviral drugs are keeping more people alive, one in five adults in Africa has HIV. The disease has become a social problem and a systematic issue in Africa. With the deadly epidemic, there are debates over what rights and duties can be claimed by those living with the disease. The growing segment affected by the AIDS epidemic, remains largely hidden. Lawmakers across the African continent are arguing whether to make criminals of those who infect others with HIV, allow employers to test workers for the virus, punish women who pass it to their babies, and provide constitutional protection to those with HIV. The cases which are presented before judges in courtrooms, are mixed with current science, individual rights, and a fearful public health crisis. The United Nations and the majority of health and human rights organizations support policies that emphasize rights for people affected by HIV.

From western to southern Africa, countries like Zambia, Botswana, Rwanda and Mauritius, have adopted laws criminalizing the transmission of HIV. African courts, in countries with unclear HIV policies, are being guided by colonial-era constitutions, that never catered for a huge population, with a deadly infectious disease. Two Zambia air force members were unfairly discharged, because they have HIV; and have gone to court. Zambia with a 22000 member army, has a 29% prevalence rate for HIV. Potential recruits who are HIV positive, are barred from some western militaries, including USA. Concerns are arising that the virus is weakening African militaries, and that HIV positive peace keepers in Africa could be infected or spread the disease, while deployed in Africa, either through injuries or sexual activity. There are often accusations of rape against UN peacekeeping forces.



Labour migration in Asia is international, as well as intraregional. Two decades ago the bulk of Asian migrants searched for employment mainly outside Asia. From 1995 to 2000, 4% of the 2.6 million to 2.9 million Asian migrant workers shifted to other Asian countries, in search of employment. Asian countries are now concerned with the regulation of outflows, the rights of their workers abroad, brain drain of skilled labour and the impact and level of remittance income. Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand remain the six major labour-receiving economies. Short-term needs are being matched with long term demands. There is a more open policy for professional and highly skilled foreign workers along with attempts to limit labour migration at lower skill levels. Bilateral agreements, to liberalize and regulate labour migration are being increasingly used by labour-receiving countries. Malaysia has signed bilateral agreements with Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Agreements with Cambodia, Laos and Burma have been entered into by Thailand, in 2003, aimed to co-ordinate government-to-government recruitment of migrant workers. Under an Employment Permit System, designed to reduce irregular labour migration, Korea has bilateral labour agreements with Indonesia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. The India Singapore Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

covers migration and job qualifications. A commitment on visa allocations for health care workers has been included in the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement. The bilateral agreements amongst Asia's economies are beginning to widen, so as to include topics beyond traditional trade policies concerning tariff and non-tariff barriers. Labour migration and foreign-worker issues are being integrated in the trade agreements.

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Recently the United Nations Human Rights Council has published draft principles and guidelines for "effective elimination of discrimination based on "work and descent". India's caste based discrimination comes into focus. Though not seeking to banish caste from society, India's constitution pledges equality. In the absence of caste in India, there cannot be quotas for historically disadvantaged sections, which are the erstwhile untouchables and backward classes, in educational institutions and government jobs. Attempts to wipe out caste distinctions, will lead to removing caste-based reservations. Banishing caste will be opposed by those who have received advantages from identity and reservation.

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The receding monsoons created devastating floods in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, killing hundreds of people and rendering several million homeless, over the second half of 2009. Besides the incessant monsoon downpour, water inflows into dams were allowed to rise unabated till they became unmanageable, and the release of water from reservoirs was mistimed. Related to river Krishna, water level in the massive Srisaïlam reservoir rose to 896 feet, whereas its designed capacity is only 885 feet. Water from Almati and Narayanpur dams in the Krishna Basin in Karnataka, was discharged into the Srisaïlam reservoir, aggravating the situation. Outflows from the Srisaïlam dam sped to the Nagarjuna Sagar dam, where the excess water was diverted to the Prakasam barrage, the last project on Krishna river, before it flows to the sea. Excessive releases from Prakasam barrage inundated vast areas of Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh). There was a lack of co-ordination between the project authorities of the water barrages on river Krishna. □□□