

# NEWS WRAP

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Yachts and cargo ships in the Indian Ocean are being terrorised by Somalian pirates. Despite being captured with their weapons and even holding hostages, the pirates are being routinely allowed to go free, by international naval forces. The British Royal Navy and other maritime forces who seize pirates from skiffs, offer life jackets, medical checks and hot food to the captured pirates. Since not captured “in the act of piracy” or because of the risks of claiming asylum if prosecuted in Europe, the captured pirates are often set free. During 2009, more than 350 suspected Somalian pirates, who were captured in anti-piracy drives, have been subsequently released, on the advice of lawyers. Concerns over the seaworthiness of the ships sailed by pirates, have led to the pirates being disembarked on African beaches. Rules of engagement and operating instructions are being issued by the respective governments, who are involved in anti-piracy operations. Prior to release, the pirates are disarmed and their weapons destroyed. Three naval operations, viz a Nato force; a combined task force involving USA, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Pakistan and other countries, and Navfor, an EU force, are combating piracy in the gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean.

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Naxalites / Maoists, in India, obtained their first AK-47 rifle sometime in 1988. Having received advanced training in warfare, the Naxalites keep changing their strategies, which explains as to why Naxal casualties are comparatively low. Seventeen Naxals died in an encounter in Konta in South Bastar (Madhya Pradesh) in 2008, which is the highest recorded Naxal casualty. In a late night swoop, Naxals killed 55 policemen in Bijapur district of Bastar. When the Naxals emerged shouting jubilation slogans, a policeman hiding in the bushes opened fire, killing seven men. Fifty policemen have been killed in Maharashtra in various incidents, during 2009; whereas only one Naxal was killed in Lahivi. Central Committee members of CPI (Maoist) have received training in warfare tactics in Nepal. LTTE men have taught Naxals how to lay mines and hand grenades. A warfare expert from the Philippines imparted training in warfare during 2001, to Naxal cadres in Bastar camp of Abujmad. Indian Maoists do not appreciate the Nepal Maoists participating in elections. Funds with Indian Maoists are derived from public works, bamboo and tendu contractors, and from tribals who contribute to “party fund”. Annually crores of rupees are fetched from bamboo activity.

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The constitutional prerogatives of minorities are not being safeguarded in Mizoram, by obliging parochial forces. Systematic attacks on tribal minorities, make the minority tribals feel unsafe in Mizoram. There are more than 35,000 Bru refugees living in six camps, in North Tripura’s Kanchanpur sub-division, since October 1997. In 2005 and 2006, nearly 200 Bru National Liberation Front cadres, and 875 members of Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram had surrendered. The union government has spent more than Rs 100 crore for the upkeep of the refugees. The Mizo state government had announced that the process of

repatriation of refugees would commence on 16 Nov 09. On 13 Nov 09, after a Mizo youth was killed by unidentified miscreants at Bumthong, a Mizo border village, the Mizos retaliated by burning 700 Bru houses, forcing nearly 500 to flee their villages in Kolasif and Mamith districts.

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Since a long time, India's union government and the sugar mills have been involved in a legal battle, over the basis for determining the levy price of sugar. The Union Government issues an annual Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) for sugar, as standard practice, to all state governments, in the shape of a non-mandatory advisory. Reviewing local conditions, the State governments issue their own state Advisory Price (SAP), that could differ from the FRP. During 2009, the Union Government's fair price for sugar was made mandatory for the states. The determined price being far below what the farmers expected, agitating sugar farmers, supported by the opposition parties, demonstrated and vandalized New Delhi in mid-Nov 09. The state governments would have had to pay the difference between the FRP and the SAP, they decided. The Union Government has now decided that instead of the states paying the difference, the sugar mills would make the payment. But the mills will not crush the cane, if the sugar price is totally uneconomical. One of the provisions in the Union Government's ordinance, relates to removal of a liability of Rs 14,000 crore, that the central government would have to pay to the mills against sugar levy, which is bought for the ration shops. In the absence of a fair and mutually beneficial price, sugar produce may rot in the fields, and eventually be burnt.

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The Government of India is considering amendment of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (recognition of forest rights) Act of 2005, to make more tribals eligible for forest land rights. Over the years, the Naxalites / Maoists have been conducting armed struggles for tribal rights in forests, putting an end to indiscriminate mining, and redrafting of development policy.

Most states have tried and failed to enact land ceilings. Left ruled West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala are the only states with rural land ceilings. In Bengal, the ceiling in non-irrigated areas is 17 acres, and 12 acres in irrigated areas. 15 acres is the limit for irrigated land in Kerala. While there are about 100 million tribal people and traditional forest dwellers in India, as of date only 5 lac title deeds have been distributed under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act (2005). West Bengal has handed 9299 title deeds, and Kerala has issued only 17 deeds. Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Orissa and Bihar have not granted a single deed. Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Tripura have fared comparatively well in the distribution of forest land deeds.

The Scheduled Tribes Act (2005) allows tribals exclusive rights over forest resources, if they have been living in a particular jungle area, and have been dependent on the forest for livelihood, for over 75 years, prior to 13 Dec 2005. The central government is striving to reduce the cut off period from 75 years to 60 years. The 75-year cut off will continue to apply to others who live in forests. The bulk of forest dwellers are tribals. Non-tribal forest dwellers, those with access to non-forest lands, those with other means of livelihood, and encroachers will not benefit from the law, as amended. □□□

