

NEWS WRAP

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In the 2008 elections in Nepal, the Maoists had emerged as the largest party, with nearly 40% of the seats. Ever since the Maoists quit the government in May 09, the present coalition government of Nepal consists of 22 parties. The Maoists in Nepal, have so far failed to reach a consensus with the two main parties, the Unified Marxists-Leninists and the Nepali Congress, over joining a national unity government. On 04 Dec 09, thousands of landless labourers in the western interiors of Nepal, backed by Maoists, lay claim to tracts of government owned forest lands. National security forces opened fire and burnt the squatters' huts. A police officer was beaten to death by the squatters. As a protest to the killings, there have been nationwide demonstrations and strikes, which have denied economic growth, and caused fuel shortages and school closures. By May 2010, the Nepal assembly elected last year, has to draft a new constitution. Violence is increasing without any cogent solutions to ethnic resentments, poverty, lack of redress for those who suffered during the decade-old insurgency, civil war, and the future enlistment of 19,000 former Maoist fighters into the Nepal army. The late and sporadic monsoons of 2009, worsened the plight of 55% Nepalis who live in poverty. The Maoists of Nepal are now fundamentally a peaceful party. The Nepal army has India's support for keeping the Maoists out of rule.

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The Qatar-based Arab TV Al Jazeera channel has a vivid internationalism and path breaking coverage from all the continents. However, the English-language version of Al Jazeera is seldom available on nationwide cable in different countries, and it remains confined to the web, several satellite stations, and local cable channels. Al-Jazeera's penetrating portraits of war and involvements, violence and riots, environmental devastation, natural calamities and micro-financing programmes are not confined to imperial or post-imperial interests. The absence of any great power in Doha, Qatar's capital, allows Al Jazeera to focus equally on all four corners of the world. The developing world point of view is focused in Al-Jazeera English TV coverage. Al-Jazeera's pacifist trending internationalism essentially reflects the views of emerging developing-world bourgeoisie. This outlook is inherently pro-Palestinian and deeply hostile to American military power. Al-Jazeera news represents middle of the road developing world view-point. Moral equivalency lies in the politically weak being always in the right; and compromises in conflicts are favoured. Since Al-Jazeera's cause is that of the weak and the oppressed, it has a self-righteous conscience of being always in the right. This could also be a power of media oppression, though simultaneously it opens up the mind.

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The National acreage in India, under rabi onion in 2009-10 will be 3.72 lac hectares, as against 3.50 lac hectares in the previous year. Production at 48.20 lac tons is estimated to be 5% higher, as against 45.84 lac tons of 2008-09. Even then prices are not likely to come down significantly. During the rabi season, onion cultivation is expected to increase in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and various other northern states. Onion production will fall in

Maharashtra and Gujarat. Diversion of some sugarcane cultivation to onion farming has been an outcome of deficit rainfall in the northern states.

Maharashtra's unseasonal rainfall in the second week of Nov 09, damaged numerous onion nurseries. To obtain good rates, farmers with damaged onions have shifted to sugarcane. Delays in the late kharif onion crop have further led to high onion prices. Onion prices are also determined by the export of the commodity. While Maharashtra and Gujarat continue to be the two main producers, the kharif crop from Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is on its way to the market. The union government reduces the minimum export price (MEP) of onion if the kharif onion crops are good. A lower onion MEP raises onion exports, and prevents reduction of the domestic price of onions.

Meanwhile food inflation soars above 20%, recording the sharpest increase in a decade. The wholesale price index (WPI) has quadrupled to 7% with economic activity picking up, the prices of manufactured products has also increased.

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The school education of thousands of India's most marginalised children is being increasingly disrupted by the ongoing conflict between Maoist insurgents and government security forces. Students experience unnecessary risks leading to drop-outs, and interruptions to studies caused by Naxalite / Maoist attacks and school / compound occupation by security forces. The state governments have been converting schools into tactical bases, for conducting bloody battles with the Maoists. Schools have become soft targets for Maoists as well, to create fear and sensational news. The Naxals view school buildings as a future military base, which should be destroyed; even though a school could be the only concrete building in the village. The security forces occupy the school buildings completely or partially. Students try to continue their studies in unoccupied portions. As school buildings become targets for occupation or destruction, the village children lose their only source of education. This vitiates lack of development, on which Naxalites are thriving. Of course, Naxalities are yet to occupy any school.

Partial occupation of a school by security forces leads to perceived and experienced harassment by the security forces. Girls are increasingly dropping out from village schools. Long term police occupation puts children in the centre of danger and trauma. There are no classes held in damaged buildings, arising from Naxal bombings or conflicts. □□□