

NEWS WRAP

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Ethnic Hmong tribes of Laos, were recruited by the CIA in the 1960s to fight the Vietnam war. After the communist victories of 1975, hundreds of thousands of Hmong escaped from Laos, and ultimately shifted to USA as refugees. USA accepted an additional 14,000 Hmong refugees in 2004, who had sought shelter at a Thai temple. At the end of Dec 09, the Thai army packed 4351 ethnic Hmong on trucks, and dispatched them to the border with Laos, from where they had originally taken flight. The eviction was described as “voluntary” by Thai officials. None of the Hmong, were allowed contact with United Nations officials, who could have extended protection and resettlement. Thailand’s action has been in opposition to Thailand’s earlier measures of accepting large numbers of South East Asian refugees, escaping war, persecution and poverty. Hoping to claim international asylum, the Hmong tribes evicted from Thailand, assembled in makeshift camps in Phetchabun province. A separate group of 158 Hmong refugees were driven from a detention centre on the Thai-Laos border. The forced return of the Hmong tribes to Laos violates international Law, and they could face persecution in Laos. Splintered Hmong tribes in remote mountain areas of Laos are specially insecure.

Dozens of minorities live in poor, landlocked Laos, and the Laos government has assured peaceful resettlement of the Hmong tribes. A small band of Hmong rebels are still fighting an insurgency war against the communist government of Laos. Of the 300,000 Hmong who fled to Thailand since the 1970s, the majority have already repatriated, or settled in other countries.



China has been rapidly modernizing its armed forces over the last decade, with the Navy leading the expansion drive. The new Naval strategy reflects a shift beyond the Taiwan issue. President Hu Jintao in 2004, outlined a series of historical missions “for the armed services, placing greater emphasis on defending China’s national interests”. The “Malacca dilemma” points to 70% of China’s imported energy, entering through the narrow sea lane between Indonesia and Malaysia. China’s Naval power requires to help protect China’s rapidly expanding economic interests. A series of Naval bases are being developed by China in the Indian Ocean. Beijing has made huge investments in port facilities in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, raising fears in India. In China, a vast number of people stepping out of poverty could pose a social challenge to the building of a large aircraft carriers fleet. China maintains that it is assisting development, not merely protecting sea borne trade. USA feels that China is acquiring a more confrontational approach, for defending its perceived interests in the South China Sea.



Information technology outsourcing in India symbolises the transformative power of a single sector, of Asia’s third largest economy. The “New economy” acquired prosperity on some computers, telephone connections and entrepreneurial spirit in the 1990s. Today, India has about 50% of the global

market for offshore IT and business services. Shooting from \$4 billion in 1998, India's outsourcing revenues are around \$60 billion a year, currently. Business processing is overtaking IT outsourcing in terms of revenue, as Indian executives diversify into services such as human resources, pay roll management, and legal services.

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The on-going investigations have connected David Headley, a US citizen plotting the 26 Nov 08 Mumbai gun fire attacks, to a US national on a tourist visa, who has been running a business out of Goa, for the past nine years. To start their own business, Russian land mafia, Israeli drug cartel and American "tourists" are now staying in Goa. The law is circumvented and a base is set up in Goa, by certain foreigners, who set up token companies. Locals eager to make quick money, collaborate with foreigners to hoard illegal money. Many foreigners visit Goa on unemployment benefits, and they never miss an opportunity for earning money. There are presently 94 registered foreigners, mostly British and Russian, doing business in the state. Immigration authorities feel the unofficial numbers are much higher.

Besides investing in property in Goa, foreigners do tourism related business, like holiday homes and travel agents. Foreigners in Goa have been developing restaurants serving their own country cuisine, like German bread, Italian pasta, Greek salads. This provides a break from Goan fish curry rice at the beach shacks. The state authorities do not interfere with these illegal outlets, as they could hamper the tourism industry. Foreigners procure land in Goa to do their own business. They acquire Indian partners to ratify land purchase or registration deals, to simplify paper work. The Foreign Exchange Management Act (*Fema*) is being violated flagrantly in Goa.

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Owing to the strike in the jute industry, the manufacturing jute mills could supply not more than 40,000 bales of jute per month since Dec 09, to the union ministry of textiles. Hence, the union ministry of textiles has decided to dilute 20% jute reservation norms for food grains, under Jute Packaging Materials (Compulsory Use in Packing Commodities) Act, 1987 (JPMA). The alteration has been done after a reassessment of foodgrain packaging requirements of jute bags, between Nov 09 and Feb 2010, for KMS 2009 and RMS 2010 crops. The ministry has calculated that there might be a shortfall of 3.8 lac bales per month, due to non-supply of jute bags, by the strike hit jute industry.

Foodgrains procuring agencies, like FCI and other state agencies, have an urgent requirements of packaging materials in the public interest. The PDS system for foodgrains has to be maintained uninterrupted. Since a shortfall in supply of jute bags is anticipated, the union government has decided to divert its production control orders to non-jute packaging materials. Bulk orders have been placed for 3.9 lac bales to HDPE/ poly sacks manufactured by plastic fabricating units in India. □□□