

NEWS WRAP

AGD

The movement for a separate Gorkhaland in the Darjeeling hills, being led by the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), has scaled down demands for a separate State. There are indications that the GJM is ready for an “interim arrangement” until 31 December 2011. The “interim arrangement” could be a Gorkhaland Regional Authority or the Darjeeling Dooars Regional Authority, with an executive committee and a 55-member body, that had the power to legislate. Demands include that the new Authority have all legislative and executive powers, and a separate High Court be set up in Darjeeling. The fresh proposals include that no West Bengal state laws be applicable to the hills, which will comprise the three sub-divisions of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and the Gorkha dominated areas of Terai and Dooars in Jalpaiguri district. All taxes to have been paid from Jan 2007 to Dec 2011 be waived. The members of Gorkhaland Police, set up by the GJM, be absorbed in the police or the army.

WOMEN’S RESERVATION AND GENDERCIDE

The Women’s Reservation Bill, securing a third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies for women, has been passed in India’s Rajya Sabha, by a two-third majority. But women represent about 50% of the Indian population. Just as there is no sub-quota for women within the quotas sanctioned for SC/ST, OBCs and Muslims, the proposed reservation of one third seats for women, in parliament and assemblies, does not envisage any sub-quota for disadvantaged groups and religious minorities. On issues such as women’s health, employment and democratic participation, a recent report by the United Nations Development Programme shows the Asia-Pacific region often ranked lower than sub-Saharan Africa.

India banned sex-selective abortion in 1994, but the practice remains widespread. It is almost impossible to prove that an abortion has been conducted for reasons of sex-selection only. Priced at about \$12, an ultrasound scan is within the scope of a large segment of Indian families. An overwhelming son preference, the application of easily available prenatal sex-determination technology, and declining fertility have led to a skewed sex ratio in India, viz 108 baby boys too 100 baby girls (2001 census). Sexual disparities have risen with advancing income and education in India’s most prosperous states of Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat. The cost of dowries has fallen in parts of India, while the bride price, which a groom’s family pays to the bride’s family, has increased.

INDUS WATERS

Below normal monsoons in Pakistan last year have raised Pakistan’s inter-province rivalry over sharing the waters in the Indus river basin. The provinces of Punjab, Sindh and Baluchistan have been in disagreement recently over the sharing of the Indus basin waters, following the deficits of the 2009 monsoons. The Indus River System Authority was established in the early 1990s, after the then prime minister Nawaz Sharif presided over a water sharing treaty. At the

recent meetings of the River Authority, the representatives from Sindh and Baluchistan questioned the statistics of water flowing to them, during the ongoing Rabi crop. Punjab, the upper riparian province, demanded more waters from the Indus. Sindh claimed to be losing about one million acre feet (MAF) water every year, and countered Punjab's demand for more water.

Punjab province has a huge irrigation water usage. Baluchistan and Sindh have demanded that Punjab stop the Chashma-Jhelum link, and close the Taunsa Pinjad canal. There are allegations that Punjab has been drawing unauthorized water through these channels, depriving Baluchistan and Sindh of their shares. Punjab has allegedly constructed over a dozen barrages, and two dams and two canals forcibly, which consume about 22,000 cusec of Sindh's water. Despite objections from the rival provinces, Punjab has been seeking to draw Indus waters, through Chashma-Jhelum link, citing water statistics of the River Authority. For 2010, on the basis of the standing Rabi crops, Punjab has been pressing for withdrawal of more water from the Indus basin. Additional water has been allocated to Punjab by River Authority, during the Rabi sowing season. Sindh and Baluchistan are opposing any additional water demand by Punjab. Both states are asking Punjab to compensate for about 40,000 acre feet additional water, during the sowing seasons. India remains committed to the Indus Water Treaty of 1960. Pakistan has recently raised the Indus River Water sharing issue to a bilateral level, demanding more water flows over the Trans-boundary Indus River Water Basin.

STUDENT BACKLASH IN CALIFORNIA

The University of California was given a public mandate in 1960, to provide world class education to deserving students, regardless of their ability to pay. Now California University is threatened by California's fiscal woes and a projected deficit of \$20 billion. State legislators and university administrators have imposed fee increases of 30% to plug a funding gap of \$1.2 billion (£790m, Euro 872m). University students in California are taking to the streets to mount noisy and angry protests, opposing the steep rises in tuition fees. Once the setting for passionate demonstrations against the draft and the Vietnam war, the campuses of UCLA and Berkeley are witnessing angry demonstrations directed against the swing in funding away from public education to prisons.

Within the California network, the annual cost of tuition at some of the universities has jumped to more than \$10,000, which is higher than some of USA's private universities. Furious reaction has been sparked, to efforts to cut costs, by reducing teaching staff hours, and the number of classes and study modules available to students. Campus protests are increasing in intensity. In the past three decades, California State's spending on prisons has risen from 3% of budget to 11%, while higher education share has declined from 10% to 7.5%. With California state's growing Latino population, the applications from Latino students in forecast to increase more than 40%, over the next decade. This implies that public universities and colleges in California would have to educate 387,000 more undergraduates in 2019, than were enrolled in 2008. This increase would require an estimated additional \$ 1.5 billion funding, than the University Network currently receives. □□□