

NEWS WRAP

AGD

During March 2010, Communal clashes in Hyderabad took a toll of several lives, and left over 150 injured. Recently, saffron has become a dominant colour in Hyderabad. During the run up to the Hanuman Jayanthi festivities, the BJP and its affiliates decorated the city with saffron colour flags. With new found fervour, Hyderabad has been celebrating festivals like Hunuman Jayanthi and Eid-ul-Nabi, particularly in the old city. The cycle of violence started on 27 March, over the replacement of green flags, hung for Eid-ul-Nabi, in the muslim majority old city, with saffron flags. Rival groups went around the old city, indulging in heavy stone pelting and knife stabbings. Allegedly cow shelters have been burnt down, and temples and masjids pelted with stones. There are indications that the violence has been pre-planned, to create a divide on religious lines, to suppress the Telengana movement. The Rayalseema politicians are seeking diversion from the Telengana issue, and also aim to unseat Andhra Pradesh Congress Chief Minister, K Rosaiah. The police reaction to the early incidents of violence was insufficient, and inadequate reinforcements were despatched. Fresh violence escalated.

12TH FIVE YEAR PLAN

During the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-2017), the union government of India is planning to double investments in infrastructure, to about Rs 41 lac crores. Such a large investment in infrastructure could not be funded from public resources alone and private participation in infrastructure development could assist infrastructure expand much faster, for achieving a share of 9.95% of the GDP. Major infrastructure bottlenecks are power deficits, where the aggregate losses are around 30% due to technical and commercial faults; less than expected capacity in the port sector, a huge investment backlog in railways, and low penetrations of broadband services. Link expressways for roads, safety of roads, port connectivity, efficiency at airports, and private participations in health and education sectors require enlargement and improvement.

ISLANDS SUBMERGED

Hungry tides and the rising sea have caused the diminishing of the total area of islands in the Sundarbans from 6569.799 sq kms (1969) to 6359.552 sq kms (2009), indicating a total loss of around 210 sq kms in forty years. Accelerated erosion of land mass between 2001 and 2009 is estimated at about 84.20 sq kms. The New Moore island or *Purbasha* in Bay of Bengal, named by Dhaka as *South Talpatti* no longer exists. Though the island was more than fifty years old, the New Moore island was first noticed in 1974, in satellite images. The islands surface was only two metres above the sea level, and clearly visible in satellite images till 1987, after which it started diminishing in size. The island was 3.5 kms long and 3 kms wide, located 2 kms from the mouth of the Hariabhanga river. Though there was no permanent settlement on New Moore island, India and Bangladesh staked claim to the island, in the early 1980s. To establish claims on New Moore island, Indian naval ships visited the island in 1981, and BSF personnel hoisted the

tricolour. Now there is no trace of the island. The first inhabited island to have been submerged by the rising level was Lohachara in the Sunderbans, in 1996. Almost 48% of Ghoramara island is submerged. Described by environmentalists as “climate change refugees”, there has been large-scale migration and displacement with the submergence of islands in the Bay of Bengal.

MARINE NUCLEAR REACTORS

Marine nuclear reactors had powered Alfa class submarines of the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Now Russia is marketing these submarine nuclear reactors, as the next innovation in green power. An argument is being pushed that the next generation of nuclear reactors should be more aligned with the small power plants on submarines, than today’s sprawling installations. Environmentalists feel that the technology is outdated and carries dangerous potentials. The Russians are promoting of used reactors, which create a byproduct of used fuel. Not knowing how to dispose off this used fuel, the Russians are storing the spent fuel at the naval yards, in the Russian Arctic. Used fuel is highly radioactive, and at most nuclear facilities it is removed from the reactor, and stored in a pool of water. Russia is yet to devise an engineering solution to decontaminate the used fuel. A Moscow company is promoting the Soviet submarine reactor model, where the spent fuel is frozen along with the reactor, and stored elsewhere. When used in the Soviet submarines from the 1970s to the early 1990s, this technology led to several mechanical accidents. But Russian engineers maintain that the technology could be made safe, without any higher risk of meltdown than that of a larger nuclear plant.

It may be several years when small nuclear reactors would power homes and offices. A pontoon mounted reactor for floating in harbours is being built by the Russians. The risk of nuclear fuel being stolen, increases with the widespread use of small reactors. Capital expenses being the largest cost for nuclear power, a diffused nuclear infrastructure of small reactors could be far cheaper to build for every unit of electricity generated, than traditional nuclear power plants. Small reactors can be loaded with fuel in a factory, and they fit existing steam-generating equipment in old coal plants. The small models are tiny and would fit into a shipping container, and could be transported from site to site, in a truck. Russian nuclear regulators and the US Department of Energy have both endorsed small reactors. With estimated global demand for small nuclear reactors rising to 500 to 1000 reactors by 2040, American companies are promoting nine designs for small reactors. But the bad alloy coolant tends to freeze, when a small nuclear reactor has to be shut down in emergencies. Then the reactor becomes a block of lead, steel and nuclear waste. The Russians are storing hardened metal reactor cores in the Arctic, as at the naval yard in Grimikha, by the Barents Sea, near Norway. But no facility exists to melt out the bad alloy, which is itself toxic, and extract the spent fuel rods.

PROTESTS BY CAMBODIAN VILLAGERS

With the aim of running mines, power plants and farms, Cambodia has granted major concessions to companies, mainly from China, Vietnam and South Korea,

the overall design is to attract foreign investment for improving a dormant economy. Foreign help is modernizing and enlarging Cambodia's agriculture, mining and energy sectors to create jobs and boost exports, especially of rice, rubber and sugar. Along with nascent industrialization, forced evictions of farmers are occurring, conducted by officials, who profit from the sale and lease of farmland and urban real estate. During March-April 2010, thousands of angry Cambodian farmers participated in rallies, opposing land grab by local business tycoons. Disputes continue over land in impoverished Cambodia. Protesting farmers have burned down wooden shelters on sugar plantation. The Phnom Penh Sugar Company was awarded a 9500 hectare land, on concessions. There have been protests in Kompong Speu, 48 kms from Phnom Penh. Farmers and villagers who have been working on land for twenty years, have been given meagre compensation, between \$100 and \$200 for each hectare. □□□