

NEWS WRAP

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Along the 8,900 kms border, Canada and USA share the world's closest trade ties and kinship bonds. However, since 01 June 09 America has introduced requirements for passports and other approved identification, which are to be shown at entry points. Controls along the United States' Northern border have been strengthened, in line with those on the Mexican frontier. The new measures could impede movements of all sorts, particularly trade in goods, which were valued at \$1.6 billion a day in 2008. The US homeland security department is installing heat detecting sensors along the border, more surveillance drones in the sky, and additional cameras along the St Clair river in Michigan and the Upper Niagra in New York. As it is Canadian exporters are already struggling to counter setbacks of the economic recession.

While maintaining adequate security, border delays are planned to be reduced by clearing shipments and people before they arrive at crossing-points. In the US Democratic-led Congress, the Buy American provisions in the economic-stimulus package and proposals in a New environmental bill to impose trade sanctions on countries with high levels of greenhouse gas emissions have raised Canada's worries of increasing protectionism in USA. There are seven identification bills in the US Congress with protectionist provisions and Canadian industry groups are threatening retaliatory action.

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There was international condemnation when North Korea conducted a second underground nuclear test on 25 May 09, almost after three years of its first nuclear test. Subsequently North Korea fired a number of short range missiles. The recent test firings were preceded by a launch in April 09, of a three-stage rocket, over Japan and the Pacific. South Korea has joined the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative, a group that aims to block shipments of weapons of mass destruction and related contraband. This has provoked North Korea to cancel the truce, that ended the Korean war in 1953. North Korea could attack South Korea, if it searched North Korean ships, as part of an American initiative to halt Nuclear Proliferation.

The plutonium reprocessing plant at Yongbyon was closed in 2007 by North Korea, as part of a disarmament deal with USA, South Korea, Japan, China and Russia. North Korea has announced that it would be restarting the plutonium reprocessing plant. International Nuclear inspectors have been expelled from North Korea. At the beginning of May 09, South Korean managers at the Kaesong industrial complex, in North Korea, had to sign new, costlier contracts for North Korean workers. China controls most of the oil taps to North Korea. It would find difficult in tackling the swelling influx of refugees, if the North Korean economy collapses further, due to more severe sanctions. North Korea still searches for increasing trade and investment and diplomatic ties with USA, balanced with a Nuclear "detainment" against a hostile America. North Korea's senior army commanders are enjoying Nuclear prestige, and extending army support for Kim Jong II's plan for building up one of his sons for a succession.

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On 02 Nov 08, a landmine blast targeted West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's convoy in Kalaichandi (West Midnapore). The resultant police crackdown in Lalgarh led to alleged assault on innocent villagers on 05 Nov 08. Villagers dug up road and resisted the police. The Lalgarh movement of hundreds of villagers setting up barricades to stop the police from entering their areas and defying the administration soon spread from the tribal farm belt of West Midnapore to neighbouring Bankura and Purulia districts.

Drawing funds from donations by Non resident Indians (NRIs), anti-establishment city dwellers and local villagers, the People's Committee Against Police Atrocity (PCPA) has a budget of about Rs 40 lacs, which is being invested for improvements in irrigation facilities and roads, in Lalgarh area. Embankments are being constructed and ponds dug up. Roads are being constructed between Sizua and Lalgarh (4.5 km), Birkar and Patisol (8 km); and Dharampur and Sargapara (1.5 km). Tubewells are being put up in several villages of Lalgarh and Katapahari area. Two health centres have been set up in Katapahari and Chakkadoba.



Very few states in India's Northeast grow sufficient foodgrains for their own consumption, barring Assam. The hugely consumed rice and other food grains are imported by the Northeastern states from Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and other states. The cycle of shortages caused by this dependency becomes acute when transport links are disrupted leading to inadequate replenishment of stocks. Landlocked Mizoram and Tripura have sole access through the Barak Valley. There is now a severe shortfall in foodstocks of Mizoram and Tripura, due to disruption in train services along North Cachar Hills. Ethnic clashes between Dimasas and the Zemi Nagas, and also the increased military sabotages and killings by 'The Black Widow' faction of the Dima Haram Deogarh group have caused partial suspension of train services between Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. Against a requirement of 10,000 ton foodgrains every month, Mizoram has stocks of only 680 tons. Tripura which requires 17,000 tons of foodgrains per month, has stocks of only 10,000 tons. The current scarcity has raised rice prices to Rs 35 a kilo in Mizoram. Monsoon landslides play havoc with the rail route, which passes through several tunnels. Tripura and Mizoram are connected to other parts of the Northeast by a single road, which is long and treacherous. □□□