

NEWS WRAP

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India has more than 400 universities and 20,000 colleges, of which almost 50% were established in the last ten years. Only 12% of 220 million school-going children in India, reach college level. India's gross enrolment ratio for higher education at 12% is almost half that of China, and lower than many developing countries. The union government aims to increase this to 30% by year 2020. Recently India's cabinet has approved a proposal to allow international higher educational institutes, to establish local campuses in India. With half of its population aged below twenty-five, India has an abundance of English speakers. While the entry of quality foreign universities into India, could help resolve the country's huge education challenge, there remains a lack of clarity about how tuition fees and salaries would be governed, if the foreign education bill becomes law.

INFLATION FEARS

Inflation in India is being accelerated by an expansionary government budget, growing domestic consumption, and spiralling energy prices. Senior policy makers appear keen to risk higher inflation for higher growth. The main measure of inflation in India, is the wholesale price index, which has hit double digit figures recently. A tight supply in agricultural commodities and the poor monsoons of 2009 have raised food inflation around 21%. Popular discontent among India's 1.2 billion population stems from inflation, particularly high food prices. The double digit inflation has prompted the Reserve Bank of India to tighten monetary policy, since March 2010.

Foodgrain reserves are around an uneconomic sixty million tons. A large portion of it is rotting because of mismanagement in government agencies and faulty storage system of the Food Corporation of India. If food-grain damage is ever stopped, then every below-poverty-level family could be provided 45 kgs of rations every month. In spite of its rapid economic growth, India has 410 million people, living below the poverty line of \$1.25 a day; which is 100 million more than in 2004.

NO CENSUS VILLAGES

In several hundred villages in Chattis-garh, which have been rendered out of bounds for government officials by Naxalite / Maoist groups, there will be no census in 2010-11. Counting of people and collection of biometric data will not happen for preparation of the National Population Register in the district administrations of Jagdalpur, Dantewade, Bijapur, Narayanpur and Kankar, which were once part of undivided Bastar. Enumerators had completed the numbering of houses, an exercise that proceeds the actual counting of people, in half of the villages where census will not take place. Situated in heavily forested areas, the villages do not have very large population. The National Population Register (NPR) is aimed to identify every person individually, and store biometric information like photographs, finger prints and insscan, for allotment of a Unique Identification Number (UID). Without entries in NPR and allotment of

UID, those belonging to the socially and economically weaker sections, risk being deprived from the public distribution system or the rural employment guarantee scheme.

CUBA'S RETAIL SECTOR

Cuba reduced imports by 37% in 2009. The country is faced with a financial liquidity crisis caused by the global recession, hurricanes and inefficiency. Raul Castro, Cuba's president, has conducted discussions with the media, and grassroots meetings, on what ails the Cuban economy, since he took charge from brother Fidel Castro, over two years earlier. The retail sector faced criticism for poor service and theft. Recent measures have handed over hundreds of small barber shops and beauty parlours to employees, who must pay rent, taxes and maintain the facilities. Barbers and hairdressers would be able to rent the space, where they work and pay taxes, instead of receiving a monthly wage. The monthly fee for each person is set at 15% of average revenue generated by haircutting and styling in each area. The barbers will charge whatever the market will bear. The average monthly wage in Cuba is 420 pesos (\$20). The cost of a hair cut has risen from a single peso to five pesos. Since all small businesses were taken over by the state in 1968, this is the first serious reform of the retail sector. In Cuba, the farming reforms being introduced, include leasing state lands to individuals and co-operatives, and reducing the state's role in produce delivery.

BRUTAL WARS IN AFRICA

From the rebel-laden creeks of the Niger Delta to the Democratic Republic of Congo, intractable wars continue in Africa. Till some years ago, African rebels were in conflict against colonialism, tyranny, or apartheid. Today, nearly half of the African continent's fifty three countries are active conflict zones. Generally, the combatants are without ideology or clear goals. They prefer the deep bush, where crimes are easier, than capturing capitals or major cities. Devoid of interest in winning converts, the rebels kidnap children, supply children with Kalashnikov rifles, and bully them for the killing. With the decline of the classical African liberation movement, cash, guns and a license to rampage have become important. The armies of predators are full of traumatized children, with battle experience and killing skills, which are totally unsuited for civilian life. While Tanzania is an isolated exception, tens of thousands of civilians are killed each year in Africa. Since 1998, more than five million have died in Congo. After the death of John Garang, who led the rebellion in southern Sudan, with his Sudan People's Liberation Army, ethnic militias have been formed in the new power vacuum. Thousands of civilians are being mowed down by the ethnic militias in southern Sudan, where in 2011 a referendum is to take place, for seceding from North Sudan.

After Mobutu's Congo state collapsed in 1996, rebel leaders like Laurent Nkunda, Bosco Ntaganda, Thomas Lubanga, Mai Mai commanders, Rwandan genocidaires and a cruel group Rastas, have carved out fiefdoms, rich in gold, diamonds, copper, tin and other minerals. Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) sprang from poverty and marginalization of Uganda's ethnic Acholi areas. Today the organized banditry of abducting and manipulating children, makes the

borderland of Sudan, Congo and the Central African Republic a lawless region. Militias in Somalia scramble for the port, airport, telephone poles, grazing pastures, and olive oil. Though political grievances are well defined, new rebels surface from obscurity in Guinea, Madagascar, Darfur, Liberia and sub-Saharan Africa.

UGANDA RITUAL KILLINGS

Ritual killings in Uganda emanate from beliefs that a human sacrifice brings wealth or health. Ritual killings offer body parts, often facial features or genitals, which are cut off for use in ceremonies. The practice of human sacrifice has been rising in Uganda. 15 children and 14 adults were killed in rituals in 2009, in comparison to three cases of 2007. The informal count is much higher. 154 people were arrested in 2009 over ritual killings, and 50 were produced in court. The desire for wealth and a belief that drugs made from human organs bring rich have spurred human sacrifices in Uganda. A spate of violent Nigerian films, having a story line of a family reaping riches after sacrificing a human, are growing in popularity. The police have established an anti-human sacrifice task force. The sacrifices and psychological disorientation are linked to a deep faith in traditional healers, or witch doctors, who can be found all over Uganda. Some traditional leaders maintain that sacrifice of a goat, sheep or chicken was part of the healer's tool kit, and considered a call to the spirits, to people's ancestors. But killing humans has not been part of the practice. There are many cases, where impoverished relatives have tried to sell children to witch doctors for money. Not one of about 30 people charged with ritual killing in 2009 have been convicted.

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