

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Assessment of India's caste composition is based on a five yearly sample, by the National Sample Survey (NSS); the last two NSS rounds being conducted in 1999-2000, and 2004-05. There are massive difficulties associated with a caste census. It is near impossible to aggregate 18,000 odd caste groups, covering over a billion people. One caste group may be backward in one state, and forward in another. As states are free to keep increasing the list of backward castes, including other backward castes, the number of backwards is always fluid, and a census may not help. Since the courts have put a clear ceiling on total reservation, an increase or reduction in the number of reserved seats is unlikely, even if the proportion of backward groups, rises or falls.

COAL RESERVES

Poor tribal people inhabit densely forested areas, where much of India's mineral wealth lies. A strong influence has been built in these areas, by radical Maoist insurgents, who have promised to protect these lands from corporate incursion. India has an unsatisfactory track record of resettling those who lost land to mining projects. The mining industry has operated with little regard for its environmental and social consequences. Recent orders by the union government of India block mining companies from tapping up to a third of India's biggest coal reserves. The attempt to better regulate India's mining industry, applies to only 35% of India's coal reserves, on ground of environmental sensitivity. As the world's third largest producer of coal and lignite, India requires to double its production over the next decade, to fulfil the rising demand for electricity. The new zoning plan implies that India may have to import more coal. There is also a blanket ban on mining in the coastal state of Goa.

CHINESE MOBILES

India's mobile market has been an important source of revenue for Chinese companies. Mobile operators in India, need enormous volumes of equipment, to sustain an industry, that adds twenty million new users a month. Shenzhen based Huawei Technologies, one of the world's leading telecom equipment makers, accounted for 11% of 2008 turnover, in India. Tensions with Indian companies are developing, with China's growing trade surplus with India, standing at \$16 billion, last year. The Indian market is being flooded with cheaper Chinese goods. Earlier, New Delhi had been blocking the purchase of some Chinese telecoms equipment, to be installed in India's disputed border region with Pakistan to prevent embedding of spying devices in networks. By recent measures, the Indian government has blocked the purchases of telecoms equipment from Chinese vendors, on national security grounds. Trade tensions between Asia's fastest growing large economies are rising as India is the world's second largest mobile market after China, with 584 million subscribers.

ORDER IN RWANDA

A small cabal of Tutsis, who were refugees together in Uganda before the genocide committed by the Hutus, now control Rwanda, and dominate Rwanda's economy. Rwanda was submerged in ethnic bloodshed sixteen years ago. Now under President

Kagame, it is one of the safest, cleanest and least corrupt nations on the African continent. There are no sprawling slums around the capital, Kigali. With smoothly paved roads, Kigali offers national health insurance, monthly cleanups in neighbourhoods, an efficient computer network in the region, and public fountains full of water. However, Rwanda continues to be one of the most poorest countries of the world, with average income less than \$3 a day. Though orderly, Rwanda is repressive. Democratic institutions are not allowed to form, and the political opposition, an independent press,, and a critical civil society are severely restricted. Only few of the opposition parties have been allowed to register, even though national elections are due on Aug 10. While many opposition supporters have been jailed, several have been attacked inside government offices. In the past three years, more than 2000 people, including political rivals, teachers and students have been prosecuted in Rwanda, for espousing “genocidal ideology” or “divisionism”.

Rwanda’s president and its disciplined military have speedily restored order, after the genocide. Under Rwanda’s “ideology law”, instigators of violence and people trying to discuss or debate the country’s past or its current situation, have been prosecuted. Rounded up from Rwanda’s clean streets, nearly a thousand beggars, homeless people and suspected petty thieves, including dozens of children, have been despatched recently to a remote island, in the middle of Lake Kivu, without trial or court appearance. “Rehabilitation” in the little-known outpost takes about three years. The vocational training programmes cover learning skills like brick-laying, hairdressing and motorcycle maintenance.

PROTESTS IN EGYPT

Since February 2010, hundreds of workers from all over Egypt have staged demonstrations and sit-in and outside the Egyptian parliament, chanting demands about a range of issues, including low salaries. The government and its allies have failed to silence the workers. 1.7 million workers engaged in “strikes and other forms of protest” from 2004 to 2008. Almost every work sector, including tax collectors, have participated in labour protests sometime. The security force is the only group which has not joined the protests. Led by the National Democratic Party, the Egyptian government has for decades blocked development of an effective opposition, by using an emergency law that allows arrest without charges and restricts the ability to organize. The current wave of workers’ protests is fusing into one of the largest social movements, Egypt has witnessed in more than fifty years. Political demonstrations are still dealt with harshly. But the Egyptian government is negotiating with labour protests, and offering raises and back pay, to drive workers off the streets. Some members of Parliament, belonging to the governing party, are demanding on the interior ministry to shoot the protesters. President Hosni Mubarak acknowledges that there are still significant problems and poverty. The Egyptian government fears that whether protests by factory workers, government workers, private company employees and disabled men and women, will connect economic woes to an organized political force, for opposing virtual one-party rule. Parliamentary elections in Egypt are due later this year.

OIL SPILL

In the Gulf of Mexico, British Petroleum’s Sunken Deep Water Horizon rig is gushing oil at about 25,000 barrels a day. The valves on the rig failed to work, after the rig exploded on 20 April, 2010. The oil slick has slowly drifted towards fragile shore lines from Louisiana to Florida. The leak has already spread about ten millions gallons of crude oil across the Gulf, and compares with the eleven million gallons of crude oil, which leaked

from the Exxon Valdez Tanker, when it hit a reef off Alaska in 1989. USA's search for home-grown sources of energy is now faced with one of America's worst ecological disasters.□□□