

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Brazil's Government feels that land regularisation is of fundamental importance, to halt deforestation of the Amazon rain forests. Rubber plantations grew up in the 19th Century along the Amazon hinterland of Novo Paraiso, near Brazil's borders with Colombia and Peru. Rubber barons built Manaus city, about 1500kms down river to the west of Amazonas state. Though gold prices have encouraged gold mining by unorganized miners, in Para state, some 350 miles to the south-east. Though land belongs to the federal government, a local boss claims to own the land, and charges a percentage of any gold found. Brazil's agricultural frontier meets the Amazon in Mato Grosso state, which is south of Brazil's Northern borders, by 400 miles.

Mato Grosso is now Brazil's biggest producer of soya beans for vegetable oils and cattle feed. Small numbers of cattle are ranched in Mato Grosso on newly deforested land. Between Nov 08 to Jan 09, the forest in Mato Grosso state has shrunk by 105 square miles.

Most of the Amazon rainforest is located within Brazil, and is home to 20 million Brazilians or 10% of Brazil's population. Those who live in the hot, wet, disease-ridden and dangerous areas, eke out a primitive existence of persistent poverty. There were vast migrations to the rainforests during the 1960s, with government promises of free land and subsidies. The agricultural lobby comprises 20 to 25% of Brazil's Congress. The government has recently introduced a set of Plano Amazonia policies, to improve the lives of Brazilians residing in the Amazons. The plans of expanding road building in the forests and construction of big hydroelectric projects will damage the trees. A large number of the population derive their wages from deforestation. Once the loggers remove the trees from an area, the land is clear and burnt. Thereafter, farmers sow grass and raise cattle. Barely 14% of privately owned land in the Amazon is covered by a secure title deed. Brazil's new legislation will enable the government to identify farmers working on illegal land and in the informal economy. The new law would grant title to all landholdings up to 1500 hectares, occupied before 2005 in the Amazon. But large landholders occupy almost 90% of the area. Cutting down forests leads to around 20% of the world's emission of green house gases. The Amazon Fund, with donations from the Norway government, and the UN initiative REDD (Reduction of Emission from Deforestation and Degradation) are expected to provide payments to about 6000 farmers for not cutting down trees.

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In 2008, the Peru government had signed 99 decrees to speed the implementation of a free-trade agreement with USA. The AIDSEP, an umbrella group of jungle-Indian peoples objected to the measures, relating to forestry and wildlife laws. Peru has witnessed terrorist violence of the Shining Path in the 1980s and 1990s. About 70% of the rainforests jungle, stretching on about 70 million hectares, has now been granted or offered, as concessions for oil and gas exploration, to foreign oil companies, including Spain's Repsol, and innumerable small outfits. Much of this land is claimed either as communal by Indian tribes or

as private property. Since May 07, Amazonian Indians have been protesting violently across eastern Peru, demanding repeal of the decrees, which facilitate oil exploration, commercial farming and logging in parts of the jungle.

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At the beginning of June 09, the state government of Andhra Pradesh had agreed to supply raw bauxite to Jindal and RK Aluminium Limited from the forests of Jeralla and Galikonda tribal areas, on the Eastern Ghats. Mining of bauxite in these forests has caused violent confrontation between the Maoists of Vishakapatnam region and the Andhra Pradesh state government. The Integrated Tribal Agency in the scenic Eastern Ghats is calculated to have 500 million tons of bauxite deposits. Supported by Tribals and environment NGOs the Maoists oppose mining in the Eastern Ghats. There are strong possibilities of mining destroying the pristine forests, and adversely affecting the livelihood of the tribals. The Maoists have attacked the workers of the state Roads and Buildings department, who were laying a road connecting the quarries with the refining plants. Some machines have been set on fire.

The forests on the Eastern Ghats are sanctuary to the forest spotted owl and the golden gecko. The areas are traditional homes to tribals of Bhagat, Khonda and Khonda Reddy communities. Similar to the ravages of mining in Orissa about 25 kms across the border, the bauxite mining could destroy the ecosystem on the Eastern Ghats. In 2005, the Supreme Court had issued orders that tribal land could be leased out only to government agencies, public sector companies or tribal societies, and not to private companies. The state government has dodged these orders by supplying bauxite to Jindal's alumina refining plant at Skota Mandal (Vizianagaram district) and the Ras AI Khaimah (United Arab Emirates) plant at Makararapalem (Vizagapatnam district), through the Andhra Pradesh Mineral Development Corporation (APMDC). The seamless topography of the Andhra-Orissa border is a good hide out for the Maoists, who feel threatened by the construction of new roads, as it would provide easy access to the areas, for police and security forces.

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Since Oct 08, India and Pakistan have traded goods worth Rs 36 crores, across the Line of Control (LOC) between Jammu and Kashmir, and Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK). Cardamom, spices and bananas from India are in huge demand in POK. Again, Peshawari chappals, cotton suits and dry fruits comprise popular demand in India's J and K. A large number of items being traded are non J and K state items, and not covered by any "State Origin Certificate". Garlic from China, Moong Dal from Pakistan, Onions from India's Punjab, Coconuts from southern and western Indian states, and bulk bananas, pineapples, and moti ilaichi from other Indian states are crossing the border. Banned items like 'khaskhas' (poppy seeds) and 'kutt' (contus root) are also coming from POK. □□□