

NEWS WRAP AGD

The labourers who built the vacation retreats of the Commonwealth Games Village in New Delhi are part of the burgeoning cheap labour, that has helped built huge private fortunes in India, and east Asia. The majority of the construction labourers are refugees from parts of India, where long standing feudal oppression is now aggravated by conflicts between the Maoists and multinational corporations, in the quest for precious minerals. The Maoists in recent months have attacked the symbols of the Indian state's authority, viz railroad, armouries and police stations, killing hundreds of people. While India and China remain success stories for capitalism, Beijing suffers no political problems as crucial as the numerous insurgencies in central India, and Jammu and Kashmir. China has not witnessed waves of suicides of tens of thousands of overburdened farmers, as in India of the last two decades. Since June 2010, a widespread insurrection has prevailed in Kashmir Valley, protesting human rights abuses by the nearly 700,000 Indian Security forces. Stone pelting protesters have been countered by gunfire from ill-trained Indian Security forces, who have killed more than a hundred of Kashmiri teenagers. Rounds of militant backlash are exploited by radical Islamists in Pakistan.

DEADLY PESTICIDES

Spraying of pesticide *endosulfan* in the coffee plantations of Kasaragod district (Kerala) is threatening the local population. Though banned in several countries, including Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands endosulfan pesticide has been sprayed aerially in villages Padre, Perla and other hamlets since 1979, covering the cashew plantations of the Plantation Corporation of Kerala, over 2209 hectares, of the various divisions of Kasaragod district. There are reports of unusual health disorders, affecting the central nervous system, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, miscarriage and skin diseases, amongst humans, animals and fowls in Vaninagar, Adur, Mulleria, Padre and other areas. Even after the banning of *endosulfan* in Kerala in Aug 2001, the Plantation Corporation has been spraying weedicides and herbicides. The Cashew plantations are in mountainous areas. During rains, the toxic pesticides get washed away, in low level streams and water sources like wells, tanks and other water bodies, over 2000 families are victims of the deadly chemical pesticides. Even then Hindusthan Insecticides Ltd, a Govt of India enterprise, continues to manufacture deadly chemical pesticides.

NORTH EAST PROJECTS

India has plans to provide railway links to most of the northeast state capitals by 2016. It is difficult to lay railway lines in hilly regions, owing to the mountainous terrain and topography. Less than half of the construction work on the Jiribam-Imphal railway line has been completed. Though commenced in 1996, just 30% of the construction work has been finished on the metre gauge conversion of the Lumding-Silchar link, which could have opened up vast landlocked areas in Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Barak Valley. Delays are attributable to insurgency in the North Cachar Hills districts, extortion by locals and extremists, and technical snags. For fear of incursion by outsiders, the All Khasi Students' Union in Meghalaya has long been objecting to extension of the Guwahati line to Byrnihat. Plans for a regional airline have been frozen. There is no master plan to reconstruct and repair the North East region's pitiable road conditions. Of course, there are discussions on building fifty airports in the north-east, during the 11th plan. Development projects once started, are never completed in India's north-east.

BOUNDARIES OF CHINA

A large portion of China's huge export trade surplus is being invested in infrastructure, within China's boundaries. The strategic rail line, under construction, connecting, Lhasa to Shigatse, in the Tibetan Autonomous Region's second largest city, gradually moves towards the borders of Nepal, India and Bhutan. The 253 kms extension will cost about 13.3 billion yuan (\$2 billion), and take about four years for completion. Along with the railway line to Lhasa of July 2006, extensive network of good roads and airports have been built in Nyingchi (North of Arunachal Pradesh), Ngari (North of Uttara-khand and Himachal Pradesh). Airport facilities have been improved in Lhasa and Chamdo in eastern Tibet. Half of the rail line to Shigatse (some 115 kms) will be through tunnels and on bridges. The next extension of the railways is expected to reach Nepal and Arunachal Pradesh. The land

port between Nepal and Tibet, located at Gyirong (Shigatse Prefecture), could become fully operational in 2011. The size of the Gyirong land port will become a border post, larger than Nathu-La (Sikkim). While revenue will rise from tourism development, China's restive regions will be stabilized, as increasing Han migrants will change the mountainous region's demography. The improved roads and railways will support the border defence operations of the People's Liberation Army.

CUBA'S LABOUR

In 1968, Fidel Castro nationalized all small businesses in Cuba, and brought almost all workers under state control. Subsidies to Cuba from the Soviet Union ceased in the mid-1990s. Then Fidel Castro permitted Cubans to utilize the American dollar as legal currency and to engage in small trade, viz room renting and establishing small restaurants. Such business did not expand but to high taxes and obtaining complex licenses. With offers of cheap oil from Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, Fidel Castro again veered to a centralized economy. Since 2006, Raul Castro has been keen on reforming Cuba's centrally planned economy. The changes have covered more freedom to farmers, self-employment for barbers and permission for mobile phones. Cuba's main export, nickel, has suffered falling prices. Tourism has declined with world recession. The hurricane damages of 2008 are yet to heal. Cuba has to import 80% of its food, as half of its agricultural land is unproductive. Hard currency payments are difficult. The economists who advise President Raul Castro, favour a mixed economy, similar to China or Vietnam.

US ARMY ABUSES

Since 1992, the US army has court-martialled thirty four soldiers, on murder and manslaughter charges in the killings of civilians, in the conflict zones of Afghanistan and Iraq. Amongst the hundreds of thousands of US soldiers cycled in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, twenty-two have been convicted and twelve acquitted. Rape and multiple killings in Iraq in 2006 resulted in lengthy sentences for several soldiers. Prosecution efforts by the Marine Corps, for the killing of twenty four Iraqis in Haditha of 2005, were not successful. Before a military court at Joint Base Lewis-Mac Chord, near Seattle, an investigation is in progress, into accusations that a drug enveloped army unit, formed a secret, self described "Kill team", which repeatedly killed Afghan civilians. The high-profile killings were for sport, posing for pictures with victims, and taking body parts as trophies. In 2009, five US soldiers were convicted or pleaded guilty to charges relating to the killings of four blindfolded and handcuffed detainees. □□□