

## **NEWS WRAP**

AGD

Landowners and sharecroppers in West Bengal are opposing the union Railway Ministry's expansion plans. Since no compensation as ever been discussed, the villagers of Darpashila and Uttar Gopinathpur are resisting the construction of Prantik-Suri railway track (33.98 km in Birbhum district). The railway project, at an estimated cost of Rs 149.55 crore was sanctioned two years earlier. Track diversion is expected to start from Darpashila village, about 1.5 km from Prantik station. Opposition to the railway project has surfaced since June 2010, ever since the surveyors of Eastern Railway, has visited the area, to measure the land allotted for the proposed track. Darpashila village and the adjoining next village will have about 07 km of rail tracks running through them. Sharecroppers and landless farmers comprise about 40% villagers of Darpashila and Uttar Gopinathpur. Vast number of families who do not possess holdings of their own, will not receive any compensation. The area is multi-crop land. The land could feed the bargadars and the daily labourers indefinitely, but compensation money lasts only on the short term. Along with the district authorities, the landowners, sharecroppers and landless farmers, are unaware of the authority executing the acquisition and the compensation amounts. While the Trinamool Congress maintains that most of the land required is government property and could be used for a public purpose, the left front parties are involved in the agitation.

The Diesel Multiple Unit and Coach Factory is planned to be built on 630 acre in Sankrail (Howrah district). The villagers of the site are now demanding jobs for a member of each family, and compensation at current price, for land acquired in 1981. The dedicated freight corridor in Dankuni (Hooghly district) extends over 210 acre. The project is being resisted by Left Front supporters, on grounds that 29 acre of the 210 acre is recorded as a water body in the state land records. The Union ministry of railways has not sought permission from state authorities, before taking up the project.

### **LAND ACQUISITION IN GUJARAT**

Preceding the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit (Jan 2011) the Gujarat State Government has announced a string of incentives to the farmers, whose land will be purchased by Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC) for new estates. The farmer-friendly policy makes acquisition of land for industries much easier. The new incentives would ensure that the farmers obtain the prevailing market price for their land, given for development of industrial estates. Already the GIDC has about 25000 hectare in its industrial estates, but no target has been fixed for land acquisition. The GIDC would purchase land with consent of farmers and at the market price determined by the Centre for Environment Planning and Technology (CEPT) University.

### **GOLD IMPORTS INTO CHINA**

An announcement in August 2010, in China, encouraged retail consumption, with measures to promote and regulate the local market, including expanding the banks allowed to import bullion. During 2010 gold imports into China have increased sharply. China is the largest bullion miner, and of late it has become a major overseas buyer. A part of the surge is explained by Chinese investors searching for insurance against inflation and currency appreciation. China may overtake India as the World's largest consumer of gold, and a major player in global prices. Year 2010 saw China importing more than 252 tons of gold, a five-fold increase on an estimate of 55 tons (approx) for 2009. While the stock market and the property market could lead to huge losses, investment is driving the demand for gold in China. Gold prices could be inflated, with the rise in Chinese demand for gold. Three years

earlier, China surpassed South Africa, as the world's largest gold producer. The gold market upswing has caused an increase in gold scams in Hong Kong. Fakes can be extremely difficult for inexperienced buyers in China and the rest of Asia.

### **ENRICHED URANIUM IN PAKISTAN**

There are concerns over a stockpile of highly enriched uranium, piled for years near an ageing research reactor in Pakistan. "Dirty bombs" use ordinary explosives to disperse radioactive particles, and there was enough stored, enriched uranium to build several "dirty bombs". An actual nuclear bomb could be built by skilled hands. The Pakistani government is still dragging its feet on an agreement reached two years earlier, to enable the United States remove the material.

### **ELECTIONS IN EGYPT**

The first round of parliamentary elections was won convincingly by the National Democratic Party of Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's largest opposition group failed to win a single seat in the national elections. The National Democratic Party denies charges raised by the Islamist group, of rigging the vote. However, there have been numerous reported irregularities at the polls, and Egypt's government invalidated results from 1053 ballot boxes, due to charges of rigging. There has been no change of leadership in the governing National Democratic Party in three decades. The presidential elections are due in 2011, which could result in the first change of leadership in three decades. President Hosni Mubarak, aged 82 years, has been in power since 1981. □□□