

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Children are recruited by a majority of the militant outfits in India's north-east states. Insurgent groups, cutting across tribal communities, hire children, as investment is never high, and there are no restrictions to be followed. The recruitment of children, including girls, has widened owing to a shortage of able bodied males. A large number of children join voluntarily, while some are adopted by militant outfits from the toddler stage. Children have been recruited in huge numbers by militant cells owing allegiance to the Kuki-Chin-Mizo ethnic community in Manipur, Mizoram and the hill districts of Assam. There are roughly 150-200 cadres, below the age of eighteen, out of 500, in every camp of Manipur's Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), who demand the unification of Zomi inhabited territories in India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The Zomi tribe is concentrated in southern Manipur. All child guerillas, above twelve years, are imparted training in arms and jungle warfare. In a short time, children learn to handle M-16 assault rifles (USA) and other weapons like AK-47 rifles. Child guerillas participate in drills, mock exercises and other tasks at the underground camps, where activities stretch from 4 am, to late afternoon. There are few desertions. The younger children are not assigned to armed operations and patrolling in remote areas. The battles are with the security forces, while factional feuds leave many dead. Though child soldiers are threatening regional stability, none of the accords signed by the union government of India and respective State Governments have ever mentioned child or women insurgents, nor enunciated measures for their rehabilitation.

TELECOM LICENCES

Legislative activity in India's winter parliament session remained crippled due to the furore and protests over the allegations of irregularities in the award of 2G telecom licences two years ago. Opposition political parties have been demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee to probe into the scam. There is a severe telecommunications spectrum shortage in India, where much is allocated to the defence establishment, space research, satellites and other government entities, leaving little available for commercial phone operators. Deteriorating call quality, numerous dropped calls and failures to connect in relation to services provided by India's phone companies, emanate from a severe shortage of 2G Spectrum. Spectrum policy planning does not exist. The Supreme Court has indicated it might widen its probe to the period when the National Democratic Alliance was in power. The auction of Spectrum in 2001, followed similar rules to the 2008 sale. The Supreme Court has also ordered Central Investigators to probe bank loans to the companies which were granted 2G licences in 2008. The recommendations include formation of special court to handle any subsequent corruption charges. To try to secure Spectrum for themselves, fierce behind-the-scene battles among corporate rivals are taking place, over the Spectrum shortage. Meanwhile, another 5 MHz of 3G Spectrum is set to be released for India's mobile broadband industry. This is aimed to increase wireless internet penetration by 1%, potentially adding another Rs 162 billion to India's gross domestic product by 2015.

MINING IN SIERRA LEONE

Besides diamonds and iron ore, Sierra Leone has huge amounts of rutile, bauxite and offshore oil. State revenues from mining in 2007, were \$10.5 million. That is 0.6% of GDP. Sierra Leone suffered a decade-long civil war (1992-2002) when the then president Siaka Stevens made secret extraction deals benefiting his own coffers. This prompted the people to revolt, with help from neighbouring Liberia, whose leaders plundered Sierra Leone's diamonds. Recently two big extraction leases have been given to British Companies. London Mining will redevelop an abandoned mine at Marampa around 80 km from the capital, Freetown. African Minerals will mine at Tonkolili, which has the world's largest deposit of

magnetite, mainly used for coating industrial boilers. Aspects of the new deals are irregular. London Mining is exempt from paying royalties, when it is in a tax-loss position, though African Minerals is not exempt. Introducing a tax on goods and services, the Sierra Leone government has raised consumer prices, but simultaneously it has sharply lowered the tax rates paid by both companies. In the deal with African Minerals it is not clear whether the government is enforcing a part of the mining law which stipulates that all extractors must get up an independent fund, for rehabilitating the environment. Presidential polls are due in Sierra Leone in 2012. Even though the lethal Revolutionary United Front is no longer a threat, the iron-ore deals raise the risks of the people to rebel against their leaders. □□□