

NEWS WRAP

AGD

The world's largest spice market worth \$2.8 billion, is in India; which produces half the world's spices. 90% of spices grown in India, are used in India. Spices, particularly turmeric and cumin, are staples in India. The Indian population buys them regardless of the price. Spice prices are now 30 to 50% higher in India, compared to a year earlier. In recent months, black pepper, cardamom and turmeric have reached their highest prices. Prices of tamarind, mace, ginger and garlic have also risen sharply. The few spices that are traded on the futures markets have experienced even sharper price rises. The principal ingredient in curry powder, turmeric, has jumped nearly 150% between Jan 2010 to Dec 2010. In the same period, black pepper has jumped more than 80%. Spice supplies have been affected badly by the unusual weather conditions, that have disrupted global crops from wheat and barley, to sugar and coffee. The weak Indian monsoons of 2009, followed by an extended rainy period in 2010, reduced supplies of aromatic crops. As Indians become more affluent, and possessing more disposable income, they are consuming more of the country's domestic spices. Spices make up only 1% of the Indian government's food price basket. Their noticeable presence in Indian meals, is placing a heavy financial burden on India's poor, India's broader food inflation is running at 20%. Along with onions and tomatoes, prices of spices are increasing everyday. Affluent black market traders buy huge stocks and hoard the spices secretly, until the prices are very high, before releasing them for sale. Farmers also abide their time to sell, until prices reach peak levels to sell.

CPI(M) VILLAGE PROTECTION GROUPS

The Maoists had established hideouts in 2008 at Belpahari and Banspahari, two remote areas in West Midnapore district (West Bengal). Of late local CPI(M) leaders have been conducting political rallies in these Maoist hot beds. The CPI(M) has established a rapport with the Jharkhand Party (Babu Bose) faction at Belpahari. This Jharkhand Party faction has a sizeable influence on the tribal population of the region, and maintains good relations with the Maoists and the CPI(M) as well. The ruling Marxists have established Village Protection Groups (VPG) to combat the Maoists in Belpahari and Banspahari, and other Maoist dominated zones. Armed CPI(M) camps have been established at Gidighati, Bhelaidiha and Banspahari. Teaching classes try to convince the local villagers about the Maoist threats. Village protection groups are also being set up in Lalgarh area.

Under Left Front rule of Thirty Three years in West Bengal, the social sector, the public health system and education have deteriorated noticeably. The literacy rate of the Scheduled Castes in West Bengal is 42.21% of the total SC population in the state. The literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribe is 27.78% of the total ST population in the state. All warring political groups are absorbed in a nexus of poverty, power and party. Progressive political groups are degenerating into nepotism, corruption, extortion and a political cycle of rewards, punishment and lumpen violence.

SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Hundreds of people have died in Nigeria in 2010, due to sectarian violence. Nigeria is Africa's top oil producer, and the most populous, having more than 140 million people. The country is roughly split between a mainly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian South. Since 1999, at least 14,000 people have died in ethnic and religious violence. An attack on a predominantly Christian village by Muslim Fulani herders near Jos on 07 March 2010 killed

at least 492 people. Attacks by a Muslim group, Jama atv Jihad in the cities of Jos and Maiduguri, killed at least 86 people, in Dec 2010. Following the attacks in Jos, there was reprisal violence by rival gangs. Though divided across religious lines, the violence is often stirred by local politics, economics and rights to grazing land.

DISAPPEARED IN PAKISTAN

Reports point to thousands of political separatists and captured Taliban insurgents disappearing in the hands of Pakistan's police and security forces. There are fears that some may have been tortured or killed. Over the last ten years, Pakistan's Security Services have arrested thousands of people, mainly in Baluchi-stan, and are holding them incommunicado without charges. Though far from the battles with Taliban, Baluchistan is a huge and turmoil filled province. Members of the Baluch Nationalist Opposition, which has fought for generations demanding separation, have been arrested by Pakistan Security forces. Amongst those arrested, some may be guerillas, while others are civilians. □□□