

NEWS WRAP

AGD

In India for any agricultural piece of land, when it is converted into industrial or commercial land, the value of the land rises by a factor of 10 to 100. India's coalition national government has failed to reform land acquisition laws, written in 1894, during the British Raj. Faced with rising public pressure to ensure good governance and economic growth, some of India's poorest states, are making progress in confiscating farmland with compensation for a future livelihood, not just a one-time pay off. The union government of India had pledged to pave on average of about 19 km of new freeway, everyday; whereas the actual paving has been less than 6.5 km of freeway a day. In August 2010, farmers in Jikarpur blocked work in construction of the Yamuna Expressway, intended to connect the national capital New Delhi with Agra. The expressway promised to reduce the drive to about two hours from the existing four to nine hours, covering a distance of 203 km. Angry over low compensation, protesting farmers had clashed with the police, resulting in fatal casualties. Avoiding the usual stand off, UP's Chief Minister has increased payments to farmers, and offered them annuities for the next three decades. The farmers have been given stakes in residential developments being built alongside the toll road, known as the Yamuna Expressway, and promised jobs connected to the project. The Yamuna Expressway is again under construction, today. The UP State Government has rezoned all the land along the highway project as commercial, instantly increasing its value. UP's Chief Minister, Ms Mayawati, who has been spending crores of rupees in public funds, building statues of herself, is now focused on development projects, like ambitious highway plans, facing a re-election campaign in 2012. However, in Jikarpur, most farmers have already sold their land to the Yamuna Expressway project. Some are still clinging to their land, and contemplating future protests. At a village called Bhatta Pasrol, a small group of farmers protesting for higher compensation, clashed with the police in March 2010.

DEATHS IN AFGHANISTAN

The death toll rose in the second fortnight of Jan 2011 in Afghanistan. The attack by Taliban assailants on Kabul Bank in Jalalbad led to forty deaths, where soldiers and police officials were lining up to collect their pay. Three of the seven gunmen were from Pakistan, and one attacker was from the *Haqqani Network*, a terrorist group allied with the Taliban, and based in Pakistan. Members of the police, the army and the border police comprised the vast majority of the victims. The seven gunmen picked out security personnel, and shot them at close range.

In an attack on the remote mountaineous area of eastern Afghanistan, NATO air strikes killed at least thirty five people. NATO helicopters and F-15 jets killed 64 people, of whom 13 were armed opposition, 22 women, 26 boys and three old men. The air strikes in the district of Ghaziabad in Kunar Province and Nangarhar, which caused civilian casualties have been strongly condemned by President Hamid Karzai, of Afghanistan. The hillside area is heavily infiltrated by insurgents, and was being used to launch attacks on NATO convoys. The remote area is along steep inclines, and away from any built up village or structure.

This year there have been only light snow on the mountains around Kabul, and no rain for the fertile farmlands of the south of Afghanistan. Parts of the south-west and the north have seen serious reverses for the Taliban, and the mild weather has brought no lull in the fighting. The *Isaf*, which is NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, is applying the bluntest of military instruments, the "long screwdriver", notoriously deployed by Lyndon Johnson in the Vietnam war. The "fragile gains" are "far from irreversible" successes, and

since Nov 2010, more than 2500 special forces operations have led to the capture of several Taliban commanders and their followers every three or four days. The seizure of weapons caches is now about 120 a week.

FOREIGN INTERVENTION

Demonstrators in Yemen's capital, Sanaa and the Port city of Mukalla, are demanding jobs and greater political freedom. While President Saleh has been proposing a new constitution, guaranteeing the independence of parliament and judiciary, Yemeni security forces are firing live bullets and tear gas on pro-democracy demonstrations, leading to fatal casualties.

Saudi troops, part of the Gulf Countries Peninsular Shield Force, under the regulations of the Gulf Cooperation Council, entered the Gulf Kingdom of Bahrain, to quell protesters in the strife torn country. Most of the protesters are Shias, challenging a Sunni King. Bahrain has been transformed into a proxy battle between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Egyptians have approved constitutional reforms, that impose limits on the length of time, a president can spend in office, restricting a leader to two four-year terms. The reforms are backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, the main Islamist group, and remnants of Mubaraks's National Democratic Party.

Libyan government war planes have been attacking pro-democracy protesters in Brega, Tripoli and Benghazi. Over 3000 Libyan civilians have so far been killed in the clashes. In a military intervention, authorised by the United Nations, to help the rebels, US and European bomber aircrafts, warships and cruise missiles have targeted Libyan defence installations. The UN Security Council has approved a "No Fly" zone over Libya. □□□