

NEWS WRAP

AGD

THE SECOND WEEK OF DEC-2011, witnessed a devastating fire at AMRI Hospital, in Dhakuria, South Kolkata. Toxic gas engulfing from the basement of the 190- bed seven storey annexes hospital building killed about 100 people, with all victims suffocating to death. The sanctioned use of the basement was for parking. Originating in the basement of the hospital building, the thick fog-like smoke billowed upwards through the centrally air conditioned building, found no escape. The basement of the building was being used to store all kinds of inflammable and radio active materials and machines. All automatic fire alarms were switched off in the affected building. Since its inception in the mid 1990s, political patronage aided AMRI Hospital to violate rules. There were unauthorised constructions in the main and annexe buildings, by converting two underground basements for parking cars into rooms.

Most of the hospitals and nursing homes in West Bengal are functioning without valid licences for professional health services to the public, as required under the West Bengal Clinical Establishment Rules. None of the private hospitals and nursing homes in the districts have obtained 'No Objection Certificate' from the fire services department.

UZBEKS IN KYRGYZSTAN

The silk route trading hub Osh in Kyrgyzstan witnessed severe ethnic clashes between Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks, nearly a year and a half ago. The ethnic Uzbeks suffered the brunt of the violence, faced arbitrary arrests and often horrific abuse perpetrated by the predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz authorities. Torture, leading to confessions, and persecution against Uzbeks has become systematic. Even though Kyrgyz government officials mostly deny reports that Uzbeks suffer unfair treatment, human rights groups have documented a pattern of reprisals and abuses against Kyrgyzstan's Uzbek population. Uzbek prisoners complain of severe beatings, electric shocks and needles being driven under fingernails. Out of nearly 300 people arrested in connection with riots of June 2010, which left nearly 500 people dead and destroyed large sections of Osh, about 85% were Uzbek. More have been detained in raids on Uzbek neighbourhoods, beaten and threatened with long prison sentences, for extorting money and property. Several Uzbeks have died in custody, or shortly after being released. Even though a few criminal cases stemming from mistreatment by the authorities have started in Osh, almost no one has been punished, and in many cases, appeals to the authorities have provoked reprisals by local law enforcement. It is difficult for Kyrgyzstan's president, Almazbek Atmabayev, a northerner to address the history of debilitating schisms in southern Kyrgyzstan.

CHINA'S PLA

New recruits in China's People's Liberation Army can now sport tattoos on their faces and necks, as part of a broadening of appeal to China's better educated and more smart youth.

The long time tattoo bar to enlisting in military service has been dropped. Under recent relaxations enlistees now may be chubbier or thinner than the rules had allowed earlier. Since there are more than enough volunteers to fill the ranks of the 2.3 million-member force, a draft is seldom needed, in spite of military service being technically compulsory. China's Defence Ministry is offering university students a 6,000 renminbi discount on annual tuition fees, nearly \$945, if they take a break from studies to enlist. □□□