

NEWS WRAP

AGD

THE DALIT POPULATION OF 200 million people occupy the very lowest rung in Hindu India's social hierarchy. Besides widening the gulf between rich and poor and raising the tide of corruption, the liberalization of the Indian economy since 1991, has led to a small but growing group of dalit business people. Business success in rapid growth has provided the untouchable a chance to break the chains of caste. Children of backward communities have stumbled on fortunes of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and have started companies worth tens of millions of dollars with Arab sheiks. In Pune out of the 100 or so members of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, only one was in business before 1991. With the opening of the Indian economy, dalits have started small technology companies, installing networking equipment, while others have, set up factories to make water pipes and sugar. India is moving from caste-based to a class-based society where money and bank accounts are acceptable.

HYDEL PROJECT IN MANIPUR

There is a severe shortage of electricity in Imphal town, as the prestigious 105 mw Loktak Hydro Project has failed to generate the required capacity. The project has brought havoc with the ecology of one of the largest freshwater bodies in eastern India. During the brief spell of President's Rule in 2001, approval was accorded to the construction of a mega dam for the 1500mw Tipalmukh multi purpose hydel project in Churachandpur district. Activists in Bangladesh fear that apart from harming ecology, the proposed dam will render Bangladesh dry during the winter months, and cause flash floods in the monsoons when the dams spillway gates are opened. The project could submerge 90 villages in Manipur, and displace thousands. In spite of the installed capacity being 1500 mw, the proposed Tipalmukh hydel project may generate just 412 mw electricity at any given time.

FALKLANDS MARINE ZONE

Britain's marine protection zone close to the Falklands Islands is leading to angry reactions from Argentina. The Falklands War occurred almost thirty years ago around the tiny sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia. The area of around one million square kilometres is a rich habitat for penguins, walruses, killer whales and patagonian tooth fish. Situated between Shag Rocks and the South Sandwich Islands, South Georgia lies east of the Falkland Islands. There are some 6800 marine protection areas in the world. South Georgia Island and Britain's declaration of the Marine Protection Area is the largest. The plan envisages 1.07 million sq kms of some of the wildest ocean on the globe will be protected. Even though Argentina, like the United Kingdom is signatory of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Living Resources, Argentina has recently strengthened its claims to be the sole owner of the waters around the Falklands, which

it calls Los Malvinas, by boarding Spanish vessels that had been granted fishing licenses by the Falklands government. Argentina claims South Georgia as an integral part of its territory.

The declaration of marine protection area in South Georgia allows the local authorities to place strict bans on the slaughter of whales and other wildlife. Only designated areas allow fishing. In sparsely populated South Georgia, safe-guarding the conservationist measures is a problem. Spotting infringements and lodging of protests, could spark conflicts between Britain and Argentina. Fishing has been completely banned from more than 18,000 sq kms surrounding South Georgia itself, and two nearby exposed rock outcrops, protecting the nurseries that young fish require, and providing secure feeding for predators. Fishing is illegal in each of the eight South Sandwitch Islands, which will have a similar buffer zone, amounting to another 2000 sq kms.

BLOOD DIAMONDS

Since the lifting of the international ban on Zimbabwe President Mugabe's "Blood Diamonds", a company jointly owned by China and Zimbabwe has started selling diamonds, from the notorious Marange field. Valued at \$160 million (103 million pound), gems were on sale in a secure room of the state owned Zimbabwe Minerals Marketing Corporation in Harare. The diamonds were on sale by Anjin Investments, a locally registered joint venture between a Chinese State Corporation and the Zimbabwe Army. After seizing the British company that owned the Marange field at gunpoint in 2006, Mr Mugabe's government turned it over to thousands of illegal diggers. Mining licenses were issued secretly to foreign companies in partnership with Mr Mugabe's trusted military. Anjin was allotted a stretch of 1800 hectare alluvial diamond field. □