

NEWS WRAP

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THE JAIPUR LITERATURE festival of January 2012 was afflicted by a free speech controversy when author Salman Rushdie declared that he would not attend because the law enforcement authorities had warned of a threat against his life by 'paid assassins'. News media outlets and twitter messages suggested that there were no threats, and the assassination plot had been invented by the Rajasthan police, to discourage the acclaimed author from attending Rushdie's 1988 novel, 'The Satanic Verses' is banned in India, and the author remains extremely unpopular with some conservative muslims. Muslim clerics in India has demanded that the state authorities prohibit the author from visiting India, for the festival. Certain muslim groups had threatened to organize huge protests in Jaipur, if Mr Rushdie was present. The state government of Rajasthan maintained that the threat against the author was real. Mr Rushdie had made several trips to India earlier, and made an appearance at the Jaipur Festival in 2007. There have been concerns over riding censorship and limits of freedom of expression in India. At the festival, four authors read out short photocopy passages from 'The Satanic Verses'. The silence of some politicians can be related to assembly elections of February 2012 in Uttar Pradesh, which has a large muslim population.

Tasleema Nasreen's autobiography '*Nirvasan—Exile*' was available on sale, at the Kolkata Book Fair of January-February, 2012. However, the official release of the seventh part of the book at the Book Fair, by the organizers, namely, the Publishers and Booksellers Guild was cancelled, following threats by religious fundamentalists. Hurting the sentiments of a minority community and questions of security of the fair ground led to the cancellation. All the same, in front of the People's Book Society stall at the fair, writers and book lovers held the book high in their hands.

BAUXITE MINES IN AP

There are 600 million tons of bauxite in Andhra Pradesh, accounting for 21% of India's total reserves. The eastern ghats of Visakhapatnam have 90% of the bauxite, concentrated in six deposits, falling in the Agency area, which is rich in reserve forests and bio-diversity. In spite of a Supreme Court Judgement (1997) aimed to protect the constitutional rights of tribals over their traditional land and resources, the Union Government of India plans to mine *twenty seven* hills in the Araku Valley, Ananthagiri, Chintapalli and GK Veddhi blocks of the Agency area, traditionally inhabited by Kondhs, Bagatas, Konda Reddis and Samanta tribes, in at least 270 villages. The agency area falls under the schedule Five category. There is anger in the Agency area for the government's sanction of aluminium plants to Jindal South West Holdings Ltd and Anrak, a joint venture of Ral al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates and the Andhra Pradesh based Penna Cements. The aluminium plants will require bauxite as raw material. Most of the villages in the agency area are small farmers, with holdings of up to one hectare cultivating

coarse rice, jowar, pulses, beans and coffee. 160,000 hectares of the agency area belongs to tribals, as per the Forest Rights Act, but the government has so far granted pattas (land titles) for 160,000 hectares.

CHINA'S URBAN AREAS

Job opportunities are rapidly growing in China's urban areas, and more Chinese citizens are living in urban areas than in the countryside. The country's gross domestic product is growing at 8.9%. Rising up from 49.95% (end 2010), a Chinese population of 691 million people, i.e. 51.27% of China's citizens live in urban areas. China's urbanization has not been smooth and even, and is dependent on rapid growth in the overall economy. During the global financial crisis and a sharp drop in Chinese exports, in early 2009 around 25 million rural migrants stopped searching for work, and returned to the countryside. There are tight credit conditions on the property market.

High Indian interest rates and a sharp fall in the value of the rupee are straining the finances of India's companies. Indian billionaire Anil Ambani has secured a \$1.2 billion loan from three Chinese state-backed banks. Reliance's R-COM, the mobile telecom conglomerate, will use the loan to refinance a 1.2 billion convertible bond, which has been due for repayment since March 2010.

REFORMS ACROSS MYANMAR

The cult around Aung San Suu Kyi is steadily becoming visible in biographies of Suu Kyi being sold in Yangon bookshops, and calendars displaying photographs of the de facto Opposition leader and her late father, Aung San, the independence movement hero. Authorities in Myanmar are proceeding with political and economic reforms. Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of state and George Soros, the billionaire investor have recently met Ms Suu Kyi, who has announced her first run for political office. If she wins a seat in April 2012 in Myanmar's 440-seat lower house of parliament, she would earn a place to influence legislators. Since August 2011, the nominally civilian government of Thein Sein, a former general, has abolished censorship, revamped labour laws, and held talks with ethnic rebels, securing a ceasefire with the Karen National Union in mid-January 2012. Hundreds of political prisoners have been released. Even then some political detainees remain in jail, and charges have yet to be removed on those freed. Economic growth is expected to reach 5.5%. With Uncle Sam is now trying to rehabilitate Myanmar in its orbit New Delhi too is beginning to explore Myanmar's market.

NORTH KOREAN IMPORTS

The US led sanctions on North Korea were imposed after the Communist country conducted a nuclear test in 2006, and strengthened after the country's second nuclear test in 2009. Many of the sanctions were aimed at preventing sale of drugs and weapons for raising hard currency, and also to restrict purchase of luxury goods, including items like iPods and laptops

for the elite. The sanctions have been ineffective mainly since the United Nations had allowed member states to decide for themselves what counts as a luxury item. China's exports to North Korea of products including cars, tobacco, laptops, cellphones and domestic electrical appliances have increased significantly over the past five years. Chinese exports and smuggling especially over the Chinese border, explain the vast majority of luxury items imported into North Korea. Since 2007, North Korea's imports of cars, laptops and air conditioners have each increased four times, and imports of cell phones have increased by more than 4,200%. China is the biggest exporter of cars to North Korea. The political elite and a new entrepreneurial class of up to 1% of the population in North Korea is fuelling the growing demand for Chinese consumer goods. □□