

NEWS WRAP

AGD

WELFARE SPENDING HAS been increasing in India, without much economic reforms. Multiple graft scandals are occurring, as big government expands. Domestic fuel prices have been hiked, which is administered by the government, but without any deregulation of prices. While the union government of India has subsidized most petroleum products, it grossly under-prices kerosene, the poor man's cooking oil. Organized crime makes a profit by adulterating more expensive gasoline with kerosene. Real estate and telecom are the most corrupt business sectors where the government rules are most expansive or least transparent. Aimed to guarantee the rural unemployed 100 days of work, the nationwide rural jobs scheme has generated large number of cases of bureaucrats siphoning off money. The Food Security bill will raise India's annual food subsidies to one trillion rupees (\$22.4 billion), but the delivery mechanism for food subsidies is submerged in massive corruption. Ration cards that identify subsidy recipients are easily forged. The ration shopkeepers sell subsidized grains at market prices, and pocket the difference. Capital has taken flight since 2010, and manufacturing and fixed investment are slowing down. The GDP growth has slipped below 8%, as business finds fewer opportunities to expand.

RIVER POLLUTION IN NADIA

There has been a continuous flow of polluted water and hazardous waste from Bangladesh sugar mills and wine plants into the Ichamati, Churni and Mathabhanga rivers. A large number of fishermen, living along the embankment of the rivers in Nadia and parts of North 24 Parganas district are faced with despair, as the polluted water of the rivers is unable to support fish and other aquatic life. Since long a blockage has built up at the source of river Ichamati at Pabkhali village in Majhdia. Flowing through Shibnivas, Hanskhali, Birnagar, Aranghata and Ranaghat, the Churni river joins the Bhagirathi river, near Chakdah. Supply of fish has fallen significantly, and the rivers scarcely cater to agricultural needs.

TRIBALS IN SUNDERBANS

Hailing from Ranchi, Manbhum, Singhbhum, Dalbhum and Mayurbhanj areas of Jharkhand, most tribals in the Sunderbans (South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal) are associated with their traditional business of hooch or country liquor manufacturing. Failures in implementation of 100 days job guarantee scheme, under National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) have led to a large number of tribals, residing in several blocks of the Sunderbans, to engage themselves in 'haria' (hooch) manufacturing units, to earn a living. Earlier tribals who had been provided employment under NREGA schemes, later disassociated themselves from the hooch manufacturing business. In many cases, job cards of NREGA beneficiaries are under the possession of political parties. Tribal people have to depend on political local committees to get BPL and job cards. Several tribal communities, comprising Munda, Oraon, Bedia, Bhumija, Mahali, Kora and Ganda, live in the 19 blocks of the Sunderbans. Tribals are frequently despatched to jails, when they protest against illegal fisheries in the area.

AFGHAN TROOPS TAKE COMMAND

While US and NATO forces have injured the Taliban in Afghanistan, they have failed to reverse a rise in civilian deaths. In the second fortnight of July 2011, General John Allen, a former deputy director of Central Command, assumed command over the 140,000 strong US and NATO forces, in Afghanistan. As part of a security overhaul, the former Commander General David Petraeus, the New Central Intelligence Army Chief, continues to monitor operations by CIA paramilitary units in Afghanistan, and drone attacks in Pakistan's tribal areas. The western allies are moving towards the exit, as Afghan security forces are steadily taking formal responsibility. Afghan police have assumed command in peaceful Bamiyan province. Even though six other towns and provinces have come under the control of Afghan security forces, the transfer of command is symbolic, as the western forces will take the lead, until foreign combat troops leave in 2014.

The Taliban have been pushed from some strongholds in the south, which increased security for people residing around US positions. The western forces' kill-or-capture raids finished hundreds of insurgent chiefs from the battle fields, but enraged many Afghan communities. □□