

NEWS WRAP

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Without any signs of a visible opposition, the communist party rules in Laos. US secret agents would recruit members of Laos' Hmong ethnic minority to conduct raids on Vietnamese supply lines, during the war in Indo-China. Following the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam and Laos in 1975, about 1,00,000 Hmong rebels settled in USA. General Vang Pao, one of the Hmong commanders collected money from the Hmong expatriates, with promises of a victorious return to Laos. Today a few of the Hmong tribes have joined the ruling party in Laos, gaining high ranks. But over the years, isolated fighting has occurred between Laos government troops and unidentified rebels, and sometimes in north of the capital Vientiane.

Many Hmong exiles in USA were curious to the final disposal of their financial contributions, since there were no indications of change in the power structure of the communists. On 04 June 07, US federal prosecutors announced the arrest of Mr Vang Pao and nine others, alleged to be involved in a plot to buy guns, missiles and explosives, for staging a coup in Laos. The charges filed indicated a plan to hire mercenaries, for blowing up government buildings in the capital, Vientiane. It is indeed strange that a former enemy USA, has now uncovered a coup plot in Laos, particularly bordering Thailand. Towards the end of May 07, the Thai border forces despatched 31 Hmong rebels, sheltered within its border region.

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In the fifteen small countries of the Caribbean community, there are about 2,00,000 Muslims, living mostly in Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. They are descendents from Asian indentured labourers, who were inducted to the sugar fields, after the end of slavery. Some converts from Christianity have joined the Muslims, since the 1960s. Though less represented in politics, the Muslims have been successful in business and the independent professions. The muslims in the Caribbean are devout, and have a small section of radical minority. The *Jamaat al Muslimeen* of Trinidad is led by Yasin Abu Bakr, alias Lennox Phillip, an ex-policeman. Sometime in 1990, the *Jamaat al Muslimeen* attempted a coup, holding the parliament and prime minister hostage at gunpoint for six days in Port of Spain, which left 24 dead.

In the first week of June 07, one man was arrested in Brooklyn, New York, and three men arrested in Trinidad. They were charged with planning to blow up fuel tanks and pipelines, at New York's Kennedy Airport. The South-eastern Caribbean has become the focus of the latest alleged terror plot against USA. Three of the suspects are Guyanese and one is Trinidadian. The plot was at the preliminary planning stage. US officials claim that those arrested for New York's Kennedy Airport plot were in touch with Mr Abu Bakr. Surveillance is bound to increase for the 1.5 million Caribbean migrants living in USA.

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The twenty-four-year-old ethnic war in Sri Lanka has claimed more than 70,000 lives. Government forces and Tamil Tigers look forward to major battles, while the ceasefire brokered by Norway in 2002, is officially still being pursued. The Tamils demand an end to discrimination, that has virtually excluded them from employment in the police and army. The Tamil Tigers aim to achieve a fair apportioning of power, to a united north-eastern province. The Sri Lankan army now occupies more ground in the eastern Eelam

region, than it possessed for more than a decade. It is attempting to drive out about 500 Tamils, from their last two eastern hideouts, in the thick jungles to the north-west and south-west of Batticaloa town. There are about 25,000 government soldiers around Batticaloa. The Tamil Tigers have the latest weapons system, which includes a fleet of ten light Czech aircraft, imported in pieces during the ceasefire, which were used in two recent bombings on Colombo. The Sri Lankan government is trying to purchase five Russian Mig-19s. A wealthy Tamil diaspora in USA, Canada, Britain and Australia provide a strong support base for the Tamil Tiger rebels. The exiles are taxed by the Tamil Tigers, and credit card frauds provide cash for purchase of arms. Ten oceanic ships controlled by the rebels, transport arms from south-east Asian arms dealers.

While the war raged, the Sri Lankan economy grew by 5% annually, during the 1990s. During 2006-07, the economy grew by 7%, in spite of the devastations of the tsunami of December 04, when 35,000 Sri Lankans perished. The per capita income of Sri Lanka is \$1350, almost double of India. The inhabitants of Sri Lanka are fully literate, comprising 75% in halsee, and 12% Sri Lankan Tamils.



Academic standards have been declining for Indian Muslims in Urdu schools in India. Except for Delhi and Maharashtra, schools in the Urdu regions, have done poorly in the school leaving examinations. In the CBSE Board exams, the all-India Urdu school results for Class X are 50 percent success, against 78 percent success for non-Urdu schools. Similarly, for Class XII, the all-India Urdu school results are 66 percent, whereas 85 percent for the non-Urdu schools. Overall the results are discouraging, even though these results are the best in the last two decades.

Muslims do not consider, education as a priority. As a community, Muslims are primarily agriculturists and artisans. They believe that they suffer discrimination in recruitment, selection and employment, Social taboos till recently, prevented less well off Muslim girls from attending school. Following the findings of the Sachar Committee, urgent action is required to improve the infra-structure and environment of the 10,000 Urdu-medium secondary schools. Even though Urdu is being propagated by Hindi cinema, TV channels, FM radio, madrasas and the recitation of couplets by Ghalib, Iqbal and Faiz, there are few purchasers for Urdu publications. □□□