

NEWS WRAP

AGD

TRADERS FROM THE middle-east have been drawn to Yiwu, a small town in eastern China, since 2000, on account of its expanding markets. Till then there were scarcely any Muslims in Yiwu. From distant Yunnan, Gansu and Quinghai, the Chinese indigenous Muslim minority the Hui community followed the middle easterners. Cosmopolitan Yiwu is more friendlier to the Islamic religion, than western China. A large number of the Hui minority speak Arabic, which permits them to grab attractive employment with middle eastern business ventures. Comprising foreign and Chinese, Yiwu's Muslim population is now about 20,000. Kurd and Turk Sunni, Iraq Shia and Saudi Arabian Wahhabi live peacefully in Yiwu, far from sectarian conflicts which flare up in their countries of origin. The fighting in Iraq and other parts of the middle east, is detrimental to business. Camaraderie amongst the Arab and Kurd Traders is strengthened by business acumen and loneliness. Some of the middle easterners have been in China for the last eight years.

Yiwu is China's largest small-commodities market. While commerce strengthens solidarity, very few of Yiwu's middle east Traders have any strong command over the Mandarin language. The middle east Traders visit China on long term business visas, which after a break are renewed for another six months. Every six months, the traders purchase bulk cheap clothes and hardware, and fly to Dubai, Baghdad or Tehran. Some of the middle easterners gain jobs as consultants or visa agents. Prejudices are not allowed to interfere amongst the atheist Han, the Hui minority Muslim and the foreign Muslims. Business is rapidly booming amongst the ethnic and successful capitalists in Yiwu.

♣.....♣.....♣

Down in the South Pacific ocean and touching the Solomon sea, devolution of authority to Bougainville by the government of Papua New Guinea, has been highly influenced by mine ownership and mining revenue regulations. Rebellious wars ended in 1997, after claiming 15,000 to 20,000 lives. Land Owner disputes and the distribution of revenues from the large Panguna copper mine, operated by a Rio Tinto subsidiary, had led to the rebellions. Bougainville's independence struggle, led by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), arose from rebellion clashes with the Papua New Guinea government's army. There was a prolonged conflict among the islanders, even after the PNG's army withdrew, following a ceasefire in 1990. The peace agreements of 2001, between the BRA and the PNG, allowed greater autonomy for Bougainville, and a referendum for independence in 2015 to 2020. Power was to have been devolved to the Autonomous Government of Bougainville (ABG) during the interim period.

Mineral deposits under Bougainville's rain forest covered mountain ranges had caused over ten years long civil war between Bougainville and Papua New Guinea. Bougainville's politicians now plan to divert the mining revenue for reconstruction of the damaged and ruined infrastructure, and improve the living standards of the local population. While the PNG government feels the need to transfer supervisory powers over mining to the Autonomous Government of Bougainville, they insist that the PNG remain owners of all the resources. The

ABG is unwilling to accept PNG's ownership of resources. The present division of mining royalties provides 20% to landowners, and 80% to local government, leaving nothing to the central Papua New Guinea government, of prime minister Sir Michael Somare. Mr Joseph Kabui president of the ABG is keen to negotiate with the national government, the distribution of company taxation, which is the biggest source of mining revenue. There are fears of the unscrupulous international mining companies taking advantage of the inexperienced ABG.

¶.....¶.....¶

The state government of Jharkhand has recommended to the central government to allocate the Meghad-buru-Karampada ore mines (West Singhbhum district) for the Arcelor-Mittal project. The 500-hectare Meghadburu-Karampada mines contain deposits of nearly 600 million tons of ore reserves. Arcelor-Mittal is yet to acquire the land, but the site has been identified at 45 km from Ranchi. The proposed site stretches from the border of Kamdara block (Gumla district) to Torpa block (Khunti district). The population of the area is sparse. The nearest railway station is Govindpur. In October 04, Mr L N Mittal, the company's owner, had expressed interest in an investment of \$11.5 billion (Rs 40,000 crores), for establishing a 12-million capacity greenfield steel plant, along with a township, a technical institute, and a 2500 mega watt thermal power plant.

The company has plans to pump water for the iron ore plants and township, from the local Koel river. The Koel-Karo Jan Sanghatan, comprising a group of tribals is opposing the project, and desisting from parting with the land. On the other hand, the non-tribals feel that backwardness of the area will decline, once the iron ore project emerges. The company has also acquired the coal block. The state government is agreeable to help the company acquire 25,000 acres; and grant lease of coal and iron ore reserves for twenty to thirty years. □□□