

NEWS WRAP

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FARMERS IN AFGHANISTAN harness only 12 to 15% of the rain water which is captured sufficiently by the extensive mountain ranges. Rest of the rain water glides into the southern desert or the neighbouring countries. There is growing violence in Afghanistan over competition for natural resources, like land and water. The old problem is becoming acute, with the return of millions of war refugees and by years of internal strife, that have resulted in chaotic land tenure. Armed Kuchi Nomads, who are Sunni Muslim and ethnic Pashtun, have displaced more than 4000 Hazaras, a Shia Muslim ethnic minority, from Behsood district, part of Wardak province in the past two months, sixty five Hazara villages in the Hazarajat region, having Behsood district in the eastern extreme, have been drained of people and livestock. About a dozen have been killed. The Kuchis are about two hundred fighting men, together with their families and livestock.

With an increasing population, the area is poor in resources. For centuries, the Hazaras and The Kuchis have been poor and deprived. the annual migrations of the Kuchis face competition of land and water, from the expansion of settled communities, like the Hazaras. The Hazaras allege that they are confronted by fighting Nomads, supporting the Taliban, who are exploiting inter-ethnic and sectarian divisions. The Kutchi armed bands feel that they are forcibly being excluded from pasturelands, by the Hazaras, who were trying to establish an Iranian-backed Shia mini-state, in the central highlands of Afghanistan. So far the Afghan government has not responded to the Kuchi incursion. There are just forty policemen in Behsood. With theoretical jurisdiction over Wardak, the Turkish Army Provincial Reconstruction Team, a part of the international aid to Afghanistan, have not conducted any operation in Behsood. Meanwhile the Afghan government has selected about 520 potential sites, for small and medium sized irrigation and hydro-electricity dams. But loss of Afghan water surplus, could lead to water shortages amongst Afghanistan's neighbours.

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The war in Congo (1998-2003) left about four million dead. Joseph Kabila, nominated president in 2001, after his father Laurent, was assassinated, is still president, possessing a five year mandate, after winning 58% of the votes in the 2006 elections. The first five years as president had seen efforts to defeat rebels supported by armies of neighbouring countries, and then propping up an unwieldy transitional government. Now nine months after Congo's elections, the tasks are to rebuild the country, which has already suffered by years of dictatorship, war and corruption. Mr Joseph Kabila in his inaugural speech had promised good governance, democracy and respect for human rights. So far changes have not been very encouraging.

In February 07, the security forces killed about 100 people demonstrating against rigged provincial elections. Hundreds of civilians were killed in March 07, when government forces fought men loyal to Jean-Piense Bemba, a former rebel, who had come second in the presidential poll. Houses of diplomats have been looted in the fighting. Salaries have remained stagnant, while market prices have

shot up. Pot holes on road and massive electricity power cuts do not provide any hope for a "peace dividend".

The Congo government has persuaded certain politicians of the oppositions, who had boycotted political institutions after the post election skirmishes, to return. Legislators have assured to review spending every three months. Executives of state run bodies, will now be tested by officials on certain basic skills, dispensing political connections will, now test executives of state run bodies. But few of the taxes that are actually paid, find credit in state coffers. Direct benefits to the state from mining totals a paltry \$32 million for 2006, whereas Congo copper mining companies have earned hundreds of millions of dollars on stock markets, in recent months. The Congo budget for 2007 is a paltry \$2.4 billions, for 60 million people. Land and ethnic issues continue to create hatred in eastern Congo, where rebel Rwandan Hutus, home-grown militias and an undisciplined National army attack civilians. The presence of Hutu rebels in eastern Congo, enrages the Tutsis in the area. The self proclaimed Tutsi protector, General Laurent Nkunda, a Congolese Tutsi has refused to join the National army, after the war, and has continued leading a rebellion in the east. Mr Kaliba has despatched soldiers tanks and helicopter gunships to the east. Foreign donors did not produce any effective plan for integrating thousands of gunmen, into a National army. The UN mission in Congo costs more than one billion dollars a year, and there is increasing pressure for reduction of the UN force, with the elections concluded and new missions being set up in other countries.

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Recently there have been sporadic attacks of the viral fever 'Chicun-gunya' in Kolkata, and other parts of West Bengal. Unfortunately, the state health department is obstructed by an entire lack of laboratory testing tools, to detect the illness. The Immuno-globulin M (Igm) kit, based on Elisa Technique, developed by National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, can test 96 samples, in a single plate. The state health department maintains that the Central Institute has defaulted in supplying the testing kits, despite repeated reminders. □□□