

NEWS WRAP

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As per the last US census figures (2006), thirty-six million people in USA, are below the poverty line comprising 8.2% whites, 24.3% African Americans, 10.3% Asians and 20.6% Latinos. Spanish speaking Latinos are dispersed in all US states. Amongst them, illegal immigrants are estimated to be between 12 million and 20 million. Relations between African Americans and Latinos tend to be strained, as they compete for the same job opportunities. This explains the reluctance of Latinos to support Democratic presidential nominee, Barack Obama.

A recent study indicates that USA ranks 42nd in terms of life expectancy falling behind almost all other developed countries. USA has fallen from second, in terms of human development (1990) to twelfth place currently. Compared to any of the world's richest countries, it has a higher percentage of children, living in poverty. Forty million Americans, i.e. 14% of the population, lack basic literacy. Itinerant Latino workers, poorly educated and unemployed African Americans, white farmers in the southern states struggling to survive on a few acres of land and ex-soldiers surviving in the streets offer a contrast to the number of fridges, televisions and other goods owned in USA. Poverty in USA is distinct from difficulties experienced by blue-collar workers, and the human cost of the economic downturn. The poor do not possess mortgages and credit cards. The gap between the wealthiest and the poorest is growing wider. Inhabitants of wealthy states have a life expectancy 30 years higher, than an inhabitant of one of the poorest. Healthcare in USA is probably the best in the world, for those who can afford it. The poor are faced with an extremely inadequate basic health service, or none at all.

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The conflict between armed groups and Nigeria's military has deteriorated in Niger Delta's Bonny Island. The conflict between indigenous groups and oil multinationals has widened in the delta politics. "Youth groups" from the creeks are armed criminals, often in the pay of politicians. Bonny Island is the site of the Nigerian liquefied gas plant. There have been attacks on oil facilities and their expatriate staff. The community of better educated and better paid income earners are in conflict with the economically marginalised indigenous Ijaw community. Since the beginning of July 08, notices were displayed on walls of buildings, demanding bankers, shopkeepers and gas plant workers of non-Bonny origins, to leave the island. Armed men threatened an island occupation. Under threats of beheading and harassed by pirates who robbed them, non-Bonny people fled Niger Delta's Bonny Island, and reached Port Harcourt, the regional capital. Armed robbers in motor boats pursued the refugees through open seas and creeks. There has been an influx of Nigerian troops, who harass anybody suspected of being a militant.

Following attacks on foreign and non-local workers, a large number of expatriate workers have been pulled out of the oil and gas rich region. In the third week of July 08, a crude oil supply pipeline, operated by Agip, the Nigerian subsidiary of the Italian group Eni, was blown up. Nigeria's president Umaru Yar'

Adua has acknowledged that if security is restored, oil production could rise by 1.2 million barrels a day. As the oil price crisis continues, senior members of Yar 'Adua's own People's Demo-cratic party have been responsible for increasing violence in the delta. They have been arming Ijaw militants fighting the government, for gaining an equitable share of the oil wealth.

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In India, even though the south west monsoon has been adequate in the deficit states, there has been a significant downfall in the sowing of majority of kharif crops, including pulses, oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton and coarse cereals, compared to 2007-08. Since the sowing period is over, the loss in acreage of pulses (tur, moong and urad), as well as sugarcane and cotton, would not be made up this season. Losses are expected in Kharif production, and also in agricultural productivity. There has been a sharp decline in sowing in parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Owing to water stress in parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The sowing of pulses has been only on 71 lac hectares, against 92.9 lac hectares, in the corresponding period last year.

The sowing of paddy and soyabean has increased compared to the earlier year. This year paddy has been sown on 231.3 lac hectares, against 207.6 lac hectares, last year in the corresponding period. Soyabean acreage has been 87.7 lac hectares, against 79.4 lac hectares, compared to last year. But the cultivation of oil seeds has been lower at 144.3 lac hectares, against 146.7 lac hectares, the same time last year. The sowing of ground nut has been lower at 41.3 lac hectares, compared to 44.4 lac hectares, in the corresponding period last year.

There has been a shortfall in all major coarse cereals, including sorghum (*jowar*), millet (*bajra*) and maize. Area under coarse cereals has been lower than last year at 151.4 lac hectares, compred to 179.7 lac hectares of last year. Due to a sharp decline in the area cultivated in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, sugar cane has been sown on only 43.9 lac hectares, against 53 lac hectares for last year. Low cultivation of cotton in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, has caused a shortfall of nearby 10 lac hectares in cotton sowing, compared to last year. □□□