

NEWS WRAP

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There is a growing scientific consensus around climate change. The UN climate change talks at Copenhagen of Dec 09 had a goal of stabilising world emissions of carbon dioxide at or below 450 parts per million, which was insufficient, even though enough to prevent a rise in average global temperatures of no more than 2°C. A safer target would have been 350 parts per million. Even though 450 was not a right target, it proved beyond the capacity of governments, around the world. India aimed to reduce carbon intensity by 2020, by upto 25% compared with 2005. Several measures outlined by India, included improvements in fuel efficiency, including stricter vehicle emissions targets, improved building standards; and "clean coal" technology in power stations. China pledged to reduce carbon intensity by 40 to 45% by 2020, compared with 2004 levels. The second biggest greenhouse gas producer after China, the USA offered to cut emissions by 17% from 2005 levels by 2020, and further reduce in future.

While observed effects of global warming such as rising sea levels cause worries, there are still no interpretations of nature and global warming, based on observations, experiment and evidence. America's Environmental Protection Agency has declared that six greenhouse gases, including carbon di-oxide, "threaten the health and welfare of the American people". Even though divisions between rich and poor countries emerged swiftly at the Copenhagen conference on climate change, the global warming conference concluded not with a treaty, but a political co-mmitment to enhance longterm cooperative action to combat climate change.

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Scientists have warned that over fishing of tuna fish is driving the species close to extinction. The European Union has given £34.5 million (£31.4 million at current rates) to subsidise the Mediterranean tuna fishing fleets. More than half the subsidy was received by Spain. The next biggest beneficiaries comprised the French and Italian bluefin fleet. Cyprus, Malta and Greece also received money. Tuna fish is being fished unsustainably, when the fish come to spawn in the Mediterranean. Tuna population have shrunk to a quarter of their former size, since 1955, with the bulk of the reduction occurring since 2002. Too many fishing boats are chasing too few fish.

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Pakistan is armed with nuclear weapons, but unable to control vast areas along its own western border, viz Federally Administered Tribal Areas and North West Frontier Province. US President Obama's new strategy for Afghanistan envisages a 30,000 strong troop surge in Afghanistan, which could drive more militants into Pakistan. USA's secret war is expected to be expanded in Pakistan alongside the Afghan border. CIA's drone launched missiles in Pakistan's Tribal areas and Baluchistan province to the south are tactically effective, but strategically costly. Civilian casualties stoke anti-US sentiments and risk destabilising a weak civilian administration. The CIA has been using a remote airstrip near Shamsi, inside

Baluchistan for drone missions aimed at "high value" human targets, selected by US intelligence agencies, with assistance from Pakistan source.

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A civil nuclear agreement and three defence pacts with Russia and India emanate from Dr Manmohan Singh, India's Prime Minister's visit to Russia, in the first week of December 09. A team of officials from the union government had visited Haripur in Nov 2006, for a reconnaissance to set up a nuclear power plant. They faced stiff resistance to the proposed project at Haripur (East Midnapore District, West Bengal). The Trinamul Congress is opposing land acquisition at Haripur, claiming the land to be multi-crop. The West Bengal state Congress party, favours industry on single crop or infertile land. There has yet been no verification whether Haripur has three-crop land. The West Bengal government had selected Haripur for a nuclear reactor, because of its proximity to the sea. But Haripur has high population density, and a few thousand fishermen live in the area.

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In the past two years, there has been a drastic cut in the number of migrant workers boarding the Amritsar Mail from Patna and Varanasi. Social tensions created by anti-Hindi bhaiyya onslaughts, xenophobic religious groups and the powerlooms of Ludhiana have led to an all-time high labour shortage in Punjab. Female foeticides and skewed sex ratio have made Punjab notorious. Belatedly Punjab is now recognizing the strength of its women, to fill up gaps in the labour market, caused by migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, who are no longer returning in vast numbers. The success of the state-run rural job guarantee programme in UP and Bihar has discouraged labour from migrating. Now after prayers at gurudwaras in Punjab, the gurudwara management is enquiring whether any of the women present were keen to work for diversified textile conglomerates like Vardhaman Group and Trident Group. Today 40% of the 15 lac strong workforce which props up north India's apparel hub, Ludhiana, are women. Social relations are changing, and more and more working women are residing in women's hostels' and a larger number of girls are enrolling in English Medium schools. In Punjab, alongwith information technology sector, the textiles sector has evening shifts for women. Attention is being paid to women's community kitchens, conveyance facilities, and women welfare officers.

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