

NEWS WRAP

AGD

AFTER CHINA, INDIA IS THE world's fastest growing economy. But by primary education standards in rural areas, India comes alongside Papua New Guinea and battle scarred Afghanistan and Yemen. Over the past fifteen years, the fast paced economic growth has not accelerated improved standards of basic education, among India's 1.2 billion population. Even though 15% of children in India are enrolled in schools, some children are unable to read after three years of schooling. In northern India, only 66% of those admitted in primary classes, attend school. Teaching ability alarmingly low, with over-all emphasis on mindless rote learning. India's weak education system is struggling to supply the manpower for India's ascending economy. In terms of education and training, India is lagging behind the developed economies and the emerging economies. Even within India's twenty-eight states, there are huge disparities in employment, skills, development and incomes, the least opportunities and some of the worst schooling prevails in over populated states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. On an average Indians receive 4.4 years of schooling. The students to teachers ration in Indian primary schools is three times higher than in China, there are school classes with 12 pupils, in Bihar which is one the poorest states, parents with resources are increasingly admitting children to alternative private schools of diverse quality and school fee costs, run by Christian churches, charitable institutions and education trusts.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN WEST BENGAL

Since June 2011, West Bengal has seen around political clashes, including those of student politics, across all districts. About 1100 political workers, which include 150 students have been injured in these clashes. An estimated 40 people have reportedly died in these clashes. West Bengal has recorded more than 100 clashes every month. While about eight Trinamool supporters lost their lives, the CPI(M) lost around forty of its workers. A higher incidence of political clashes have occurred in the districts of Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri, West Midnapore and Cooch Behar. The injured in the clashes also include members of the Congress, RSP, Forward Bloc, SP and BJP.

CAIRO'S AL AZHAR MOSQUE

Al Azhar, an Islamic centre of learning in Cairo, has a 1000-year-old mosque, a university with 262,000 students, a secondary school with 11000 students, and a publishing house. The mosque which was reduced in power under previous regimes, played an important role in Egypt's uprising against Hosni Mubarak, a year ago. Al Azhar lost potency after mosques and educational institutions were formally separated, and placed under strict state control in the early 1960s. Following the Arab spring revolution, Al Azhar has asserted itself by espousing a moderate, tolerant brand of Islam, that accepted the students' demand for change. During the summer of 2011, Al Azhar published an 11-point document that endorsed democracy, pluralism, religious tolerance and civil liberties, and simultaneously asserted the independence of its

institutions. In January 2012, it introduced a proposed bill of rights, which would enshrine freedom of religion and expression, to function as the basis for Egypt's future constitution. Al Azhar's active politics and attempts to connect society is a counter to the rising power of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist movement, which performed well in recent elections. One of the leading clerics of Al Azhar, Emadedin Effat was shot dead in December 2011, during protests against the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

LABOUR STRIKES IN VIETNAM

Unskilled factory workers in Vietnam earn wages of \$100 a month, which is considerably lower than in China, which is around \$300 a month. The low wages have helped communist-ruled Vietnam invite a large number of cost conscious international manufactures like Canon, the Japanese electronics company, Intel, the US chip producer and hundreds of Taiwanese and South Korean manufactures producing shoes and garments for international brands, like Nike. Wages have been rising sharply in Vietnam over recent times, particularly in industries that require experienced workers. During 2011 there were around 870 labour strikes in Vietnam, when annual inflation was over 18%, which is more than double the number of strikes in 2010. The government increased the minimum wages in key industrial areas to 2m Vietnam dong (\$95) in August 2011, a rise of upto 49%. The government controlled Vietnam General Confederation of Labour is the only legal trade union. Workers who try to organize strikes independently face arrest or other sanctions, as they are a threat to political stability. In Vietnam, workers suffering from Asia's highest inflation have been struggling to obtain better wages. The government faces the need to develop better communication channels between workers and employers. □□□