

NEWS WRAP

AGD

There are more than 200 million hungry people in India, the highest of any country. The 2011 Global Hunger Index ranks India at 67th out of 81 countries. 42% of the nation's children are *underweight*. The issue of rotting food grains due to lack of storage space has vexed the country for the last three years. The combination of monsoons rains is plenty and government supported high minimum purchase prices of wheat and rice has led to a record high grain production of 250.42 million tons in the crop year ending 30 June 2012. At mid-2012, India has 75 million metric tons of grain stocks, but state run houses have a capacity not exceeding 63 million metric tons. With a record grain crop harvested for the second year in a row, the state granaries are unable to handle the surplus. The food that could feed India's hungry millions is going waste. Red tape has delayed the government's plans of adding to the storage capacity, leaving food out in the open to rot.

To feed the country's 1.2 billion people, India produces enough food. The government has been purchasing millions of tons of grains from farmers, guaranteeing them higher prices, and using the food for its subsidy programmes. Food never reaches the most needy because of corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Even for those Indians who are not starving, food costs are pushed up by inefficiencies in food distribution. Under the approved food security law, India's storage system is likely to come under even greater pressure, as India implements a multi-million dollar plan, to divert millions of tons of extra subsidized grains to the poorest people. Again storage capacity is required to face droughts and avoid imports. To reduce stock piles of grain, the union government of India is allowing traders to export wheat and rice surpluses, and increasing food allocations for poor people. Over ten million tons of food grains are out in the open, which are vulnerable to weather and attacks by rodents. Pre-monsoons and monsoons showers have already damaged some of the newly harvested wheat crop in Punjab. Insufficient storage space, and a faulty transport and distribution networks are responsible for wastage of 7% of India's annual grain production. Only a fifth of current ware houses are located near areas that do not produce grains. The government has to rely on overloaded railways for transporting grains, leading to delays in reaching the needy. Bureaucratic hurdles have prevented sufficient private investment to build warehouses and other infrastructure. The co-ordination between the union government and India's state governments is poor, resulting in the spoilage of grains that are properly stored. Failures in distribution over the last two years, have caused more than a million tons of wheat in state run warehouses, from previous crops, going bad.

RELEASED FROM GUANTANAMO

In a first prisoner transfer out of Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba, two Chinese Muslim detainees, held for years without trial at the prison, were released in El Salvador at April end. Ahmed Mohamed and Abdul Razak, the detainees both ethnic Uighurs, had been ordered

freed by a US judge several years ago, as though captured in Afghanistan, they were not enemies of USA. About a decade ago, the US George Bush government had despatched 22 ethnic Uighur prisoners from Afghanistan to Guantanamo. Habeas corpus law suits resulted in the release of five detainees to Albania in 2006. The US government found it difficult to find a place to send the prisoners, and the remaining 17 detainees were released in 2008. China had demanded custody, and was pressuring other countries not to accept the prisoners. A separatist movement among Uighurs in the Xinjiang region is being suppressed by China, raising fears that if the detainees are repatriated to China, they could be ill-treated. Most of the other Uighurs have been accepted by Bermuda, Palau and Switzerland. There are still three Uighur detainees who have rejected offers to resettle in Maldives, Palau and El Salvador. At Guantanamo Bay prison, 169 detainees continue to be incarcerated.

BANGLADESH PROTESTS

Since coming to power in 2009, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Bangladesh Government has been cracking down on Islamist militants, and until recently administered a resurgent economy, powered by textile exports. Bangladesh's economy has been growing at 7% for the past few years, as textile factories relocated from China. Textile exports were \$18 billion in 2011, double the figure in 2006. But the economy has slowed down to 5.5% in June 2012, which is insufficient to create enough new jobs for Bangladesh's young work force. Under a mounting trade deficit, Bangladesh has signed up for a \$1 billion IMF credit line in April 2012. Of late, the return of political violence is threatening the stability of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party complains that the government in 2011, cancelled a system of handing power to a caretaker government before elections. There are fears that polls due in early 2014, are unlikely to be fair. The present government maintains that a Supreme Court ruling has been implemented. Government policies are increasingly authoritarian, including harassment of non-governmental workers and journalists. In 2011, thirty people went missing. A number of political murders and disappearances, including the killing of journalists, are yet to be solved by the police. Disappearance of leading opposition figures lead to demonstrations, strikes and violence, adding to fatal casualties. Of the 160 million people of Bangladesh, 70% of the population are subsistence farmers. The gap between rich and poor is widening. Affluent Bangladeshies have built Cox's Bazar into a thriving beachside resort, featuring luxury hotels.

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