

NEWS WRAP

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A renewed crackdown has been mounted in Iran, on the opposition Green Movement. Hundreds of protesters have been arrested by the government in Iran, since the protests commenced in the last week of Dec '09. A large number of politicians and journalists have been detained, which include Ali-Reza Bahesthi, the senior adviser to Mir-Hossein Moussavi, the opposition leader, and Nooshin Ebadi, the Nobel peace prize laureate. Iran's government blames the unrest on USA and Britain. The demonstrations have been described by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadi Nejad, as a "Zionist" and "American" ordered show. Unrest has spread across cities in Iran. 'Jaras', a mouthpiece website of the Green Movement, claims over 1600 arrests.

Iran's regime has banned protests, but it has failed to stop people assembling for official and religious occasions. The Green Movement has been exploiting an opening to defy official repression and inviting thousands on the streets. Political and religious occasions have turned into radical anti-establishment rallies. Solemn events have been radicalised as protest theatres, like *Qods Day*, created to demonstrate against Israel; *Student Day*, which commemorates the killing of students during the Shah's rule; the anniversary of the seizure of the US Embassy in 1979, and the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Republic. "Ashura Day" when the Shia Muslims remember the death of Hossein, the third imam of the Muslim faith, became the biggest and the most violent rally in recent times. The state media and the television channels depict the protesters as endangering Iran's security. Every funeral of those killed, turns into an occasion for another rally.



Inner-party democracy in China was a principal theme at the Communist Party's annual central-committee meeting in Sep '09. At the end of the meeting the tenure idea for delegates to party congresses was not included in the communique, nor were any plans specified for wider trials of other reforms. The "tenure system" of Mao Zedong introduced in the mid-1950s, allowed delegates to party congresses national supervision powers over officials during the full five years period of a Congress, instead of just for one meeting at commencement. The modest liberalization of the "hundred flowers" campaign led to the "tenure system" being written into the constitution in 1956. But increasingly growing dissent was crushed, and the "tenure system" was removed during Cultural Revolution of 1969. In the late 1980s, a dozen county towns and urban districts were selected for experiments in the systems. Interests declined after the suppression of protests at Tiananmen Square of 1989. Former president Jiang Zemin tried to widen reforms by promoting direct elections to village level posts. When Hu Jintao assumed powers in 2002, disputes over rule of elected leaders and ancient clan rivalries had cramped the functioning of village level authorities. Post-2002, party officials experimented village-level democracy in 97 counties and urban districts, covering nearly two-thirds of China's provinces. Though the

national party congress of 2007, supported the requirement of village democracy, the “tenure system” failed to expand into China’s more than 2,800 counties, and none to congresses at the prefectural, provincial or central levels. The annual meetings of party congresses merely repeat the work of parliamentary bodies. The principle of “centralism” expects members to uphold party decisions, without much dissent. End Nov ’09 saw new party chiefs appointed in five provinces, as a prelude to President Hu Jintao handing power in 2012. Hu has warned that corruption could destroy the party. Isolation from public opinion makes the Communist Party equally vulnerable.

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At the 2009 assembly and Lok Sabha elections, all major political parties in Andhra Pradesh had promised to support Telengana statehood. In Sep 1948, when the Indian army ensured the amalgamation of princely state of Hyderabad into India, the Telegus were spread across nine districts in Hyderabad, and twelve districts in Madras Presidency. Andhra Pradesh was formed in 1956. The Telengana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) leader K Chandra Sekhar Rao went on fast in Nov 09. Led by students, there were widespread agitations and violence. The fast unto death caused the union government in Dec 09, to announce talks and assembly resolutions for the formation of Telengana state. The proposed Telengana region includes ten districts, 119 of 294 assembly seats in Andhra Pradesh, and 17 of 42 Lok Sabha seats. Krishna and Godavari rivers flow through Telengana. The people from Telengana region feel they have been ignored, and overshadowed by the economically powerful settlers from coastal Andhra Pradesh. Inclusion of Hyderabad, the present state capital, in Telengana is being opposed ferociously by Rayala Seema region (South Andhra) and Coastal Andhra.

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A comprehensive environmental assessment study of industrial clusters, conducted by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and IIT Delhi have evidence that the environmental pollution levels in ten major hubs, viz Ankleshwar and Vapi (Gujarat), Ghaziabad and Singrauli (UP), Korba (Chattishgarh), Chandrapur (Mahara-shtra), Ludhiana (Punjab), Vellore (Tamil Nadu), Bhiwandi (Rajasthan) and Angul Talcher (Orissa), have touched “very alarmingly high” levels. As many of these areas have already exhausted their capacity, the government is putting on hold new approvals in these polluted industrial clusters. The assessment has been made on available data relating to water and air pollution, biodiversity conservation, land degradation, ecological damage, and waste management.

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The Haldia port is functioning with a main navigational path, the Auckland channel, where the depth has fallen to 3.7 metres. The heavily silted navigational channel has resulted in lower parcel loads entering the port, as well as long queues of ships, waiting passage to Haldia. This has adversely affected ship navigational transport, and the shipping lines have imposed a ‘congestion surcharge’ levy, for containers entering the port. The Kolkata Port Trust is yet to finish the tendering process, for debris impediment removal, in the proposed alternate route, Eden Channel. The Eden Channel is expected to be navigationally

operational, not earlier than Oct 2010. Serving a large hinterland, Haldia port is West Bengal's only facility, capable of handling large vessels.□