

NEWS WRAP

AGD

The African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, at the 2011 local elections across the country, hopes to recapture Western Cape, the only province controlled by the opposition. On the 20th anniversary of Nelson Mandela's release from prison, occurring on Feb 11, the ANC celebrated its unity of purpose, nostalgia of the anti-apartheid struggle, and earnest efforts for the next local elections. Even then deep party divisions are visible, with daily arguments between the ANC leadership, and the radical youth league, along with its allies in the Communist Party and the trade union movement. There are personal attacks, with sexual scandal surrounding the president, Jacob Zuma, the man who led the various factions to remove Thabo Mbeki, from office earlier. The internal battles originate from an ideological clash between the pro-market nationalists, who have steered economic policy since the mid-1990s, and the socialists and trade unionists, who support a more interventionist approach.

The ANC's leftwing allies in the Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions oppose economic policies of black empowerment, which have enriched a small group of businessmen, with political connections. They want a looser fiscal and monetary policy for job creation. The Communists and the trade unions have given support to Mr Zuma, in opposition to nationalization of the mines, though nationalization has been a favourite demand of the Youth League. The Communist Party, the Youth League, the Women's League, the organizations of war veterans, and the ANC's branches in particular provinces, compete for national or municipal posts, public sector jobs, and government contracts. The ANC has its own policies and programmes for development of activists, and certain ANC leaders mistrust the Communist Party, which has tight political structures. Some ANC leaders feel the need for setting up a party school, development of a new generation of cadres, and focus on organization. President Zuma recognizes the need to contain internal tensions, and improve the ANC's record in delivering essential services to the poor.

CHINA'S DEFENCE EXPENDITURE

China's total military spending is possibly double the officially stated amount, but it is still less than a third of the United State's basic defence budget, which excludes spending towards the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Besides new missiles and other advanced weaponry, China has a fleet of bulldozers, earth-movers, mine-clearing gear and other non lethal hardware. For decades China had denounced international peace keeping as a violation of China's commitment to non-interference in the affairs of other sovereign nations. Now China is increasingly involved in international peace keeping duties, as it tries to project an image as a responsible and peaceful great power. About 2150 Chinese military and police personnel are deployed on UN missions around the world, from Haiti to Sudan. The peace keepers are a fraction of the PLA's more than 2 million soldiers. Yet they represent China's "peaceful rise" and "benign intentions". Chinese troops are serving in ten countries, from the Caribbean to south east

Asia, being most active in Africa. Avoiding direct support for NATO's campaign against the Taliban, China has provided resources on supporting operations, conducted directly by the United Nations.

UNUTILIZED FUNDS

Official Govt. of India data point to more than one third of the funds, allocated to eight of the fifteen flagship schemes for the state governments, remain unspent at the end of the first three quarters for 2009-2010. No state is allowed to spend more than 33.3 percent of the total allocation, in the last quarter (Jan-March' 10). A large amount of funds remain unspent. Major deficiencies lie in Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission Scheme, Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme and Indira Awas Yojana Scheme. More than 80 percent of funds allocated have been spent on Child Development, Gram Sadak Yojana, Sarva Siksha and Social Assistance Scheme.

NAYACHAR AND HARIPUR

More than 300 fishermen of east Midnapore have opposed the proposed Chemical Hub and Nuclear Power Project at Nayachar and Haripur, respectively, at a public hearing organized by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest, at Kakdwip (South 24 Parganas in West Bengal). The fishermen believe that the proposed projects will adversely affect their livelihoods, as they would eventually be evicted from their native abodes. There are no firm government measures for the protection and prevention of the coastal areas. Resorts and hotels at Mandarmani (East Midnapore) have been damaging the coast.

NCHER

The campaign against deemed universities in India, now appears to have been carefully orchestrated. The recent constitution of the National Commission for Higher Education and Research (NCHER) is part of neo-liberal reforms. The new structure would downgrade the autonomy of University Grant Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). Centralized planning, administration, regulation and financing of higher education would take control of decentralized academic activity. A national collegium of advisers would have a set of core members, and another set of co-opted members. The advice of the collegium will not be binding on the Commission. Universities set up through State Acts, will commence academic operations, only with the authorization of the National Commission. A national registry of people eligible to be selected as Vice Chancellors will be prepared. The Vice Chancellors of State Universities are to be appointed from a panel of names selected by the Commission, from the registry. The Central Government retains adequate powers to determine the general policies on higher education and interpret policy guide lines.

OVERTURES TO MAOISTS?

In a bid to persuade leftwing Maoist rebels to lay down their weapons, the government of India has offered to suspend contracts with mining companies in central and eastern India. The mining contracts are to be reviewed to provide

royalty payments for local communities. Maoist guerillas are active in at least eleven of India's twenty eight states.

As part of an intensified anti-Maoist operations in the Naxal-affected areas, the CRPF camp at Bandowan and Balarampur in Purulia has been re-inforced. Sharing a border with Jharkhand, Bandowan (West Bengal) has witnessed several Maoist actions. The geographical location of Bandowan allows counter-terrorism strategy for the central and state police forces in Jharkhand, Belpahari (West Bengal), and Ranibandh area of Bankura district in West Bengal. Balarampur allows anti-Naxal operations in the Dalma hills of Jharkhand. CRPF has taken the initiative for building a helipad at Bandowan, which is considered a Maoist stronghold. A helipad at the strategic location will allow aerial surveillance in the disturbed area.

Confronted with security operation, the bulk of the Maoists tactically disappear into the forests and low hills. The state combined expeditionary security forces then interrogate and impose restrictions on free movements on the helpless, innocent villagers, abandoned by the Maoists. The Maoists are estimated to hold 33 of India's 600 districts during 2009, Maoist violence has claimed over 900 people, in a campaign that has targeted infrastructure like railways and police stations, and government officials. The Maoists have mini-government structures, which collect levies on road users, and run schools. Supplied with weaponry obtained from the Myanmar-China border, the Maoists are a revolutionary army, structured into companies and battalions. A large section of India's rural population are not sharing the benefits of high economic growth rates, and the ascending prosperity enjoyed by India's cities. □□