

NEWS WRAP

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Since Georgia became independent in 1991, the population has been displaced by repeated, turbulent wars. There are about 30,000 homeless people in areas controlled by the Georgian government, after the 2008 war with Russia, over South Ossetia. Predominantly ethnic Ossetians sought refuge within South Ossetia or in Russia. About 17,500 refugees live in new settlements like Tserovani, which is large, well-built and equipped with bungalows, health clinic, police station, schools and sports fields. Other refugees live in renovated apartments or temporary accommodation awaiting new homes. Tserovani is about 20km from Tbilisi.

Those who fled Abkhazia in the 1990s, are faced with the insistence of successive administrations, demanding return rather than resettlement. Fears of ethnic cleansing linger, and return boosts the number of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia, undermining the region's claim to independence. Before last year's war, the Georgians outnumbered Abkhazians. In 2008, Russia along with only a few countries, recognized the statehood of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Around 220,000 people who fled earlier wars in Abkhazia and south Ossetia in the 1990s, live in dilapidated ex-Soviet buildings, such as disused hospitals, hotels and schools. Residents suffer higher rates of depression and illness, living in poor conditions, as compared to the rest of the population. The refugees are squatters in private accommodation or own modest property.

Higher levels of assistance have been granted to refugees displaced in the 2008 war. Contractors have been repairing buildings in which they live, and government lawyers have been transferring title deeds. The Abkhaz authorities have permitted up to 45,000 refugees to return to the Gali region, which had almost exclusive Georgian inhabitants. Gali in Abkhazia is full of extortion, arbitrary arrests and kidnappings.

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The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act permits workers to seek compensation under the Payment of Wages Act (PWA), 1936, if they are not paid wages within 15 days. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme promises Rs 100 real wage, indexed to inflation, and providing 100 days of employment to every adult, in place of every household. However, since the Indian union government's scheme was introduced, the compensation provision has been used only once in Jharkhand. Delayed payment of wages ranges from one month to a year. In most states, wages are paid, after a long agitation by workers.

The recently launched National Employment Guarantee Mission also floats the National Rural Employee Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)II, close on the heels of NREGS I. The new scheme envisages new works, convergence with other schemes and wage freeze. The NREGS II has been thrust on a "non-participatory approach" on major policy decisions, with the National Advisory Council. There has been no public consultation with social awareness groups, like the People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) led by activists Jean Dreze and Aruna Roy. The Poverty Line has not been re-assessed after the 1970s. A recent

notification allows work on private land of small and marginal farmers, even though saturation has not yet been achieved on previously allowed sections, including SC/ST, BPL families, and beneficiaries of land reforms. There is a move to freeze NREGS wages, allow machines for workers under NREGS, and flouting of the schemes transparency and accountability provisions.

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During 2008-09, 60% of investments abroad by Indian companies were routed to tax havens. Indians invested \$16 billion in 2008-09 in foreign countries, of which \$10 billion was canalized to tax haven countries. The leading beneficiaries of this investment surge are Singapore, Cyprus and Mauritius. Other favourite destinations include Russia, Isle of Man, British Virgin Islands and Cayman Islands.

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The tribal population's agitation in Lalgarh (West Bengal) has pointed to the Paschimanchal Unnayan Affairs department of the state government failing to spend Rs 50 crores, over 2007-08 and 2008-09, in the districts of West Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, Burdwan and Birbhum. Now newly recruited engineers would be posted at the Parishad's office in Bankura. The Parishad's office will co-ordinate with local authorities, and directly undertake several development projects in the five districts. Earlier the Department, which was set up in 2006, did not have its own engineers, and was reliant on the district magistrates, to execute the development projects. The district magistrates could not pay adequate attention, as they were busy on other work activities.

The Junglemahal area includes Lalgarh, Salboni, Goaltore, and Midnapore. At closed door meeting in Jhargram (West Midnapore) on 02 Aug 09, the local Adivasis (tribals) united to constitute the Jharkhand Andolan Samanya Manch, consisting of nine parties. The tribes of West Midnapore are seeking to break from the Maoists, while the Maoists seek support from the Adivasis, for their organizational activities in Junglemahal. Without the Adivasi support base, the Maoists could not have controlled the Junglemahal territory for the last two decades. The Gana Pratirodh Committee and the Jharkhand Andolan Samanya Manch receive support from the CPI(M).

The police of the Naxalite affected districts merely remove dead bodies for post-mortem examination. Not a single murder case has been investigated by the police since 2001, nor has any culprit been arrested. From 14 June 09 since central forces arrived in Lalgarh, around 60 CPI(M) activists and their supporters have been killed by Maoists in Jungle-mahal. □□□