

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Modern India's clash between increasingly cosmopolitan cities and their traditional surroundings is worsening, leading to a surge in rape cases. Cities and towns are modernising, while the village culture remains conservative. In northern India, the victims are young, educated working women, who are enjoying freedom unknown even a decade ago. The accused are generally high school dropouts from surrounding villages. In the rural backdrop, women who work outside the home are often seen as lacking in virtue, and therefore, deserving of harassment and rape. Delhi is the most dangerous large city in India, for women. The rate of reported rape is nearly triple that of Mumbai, and ten times as high as Kolkata. Surveys by the government and several women's rights groups have found that 80% of women had faced verbal harassment in Delhi, and almost a third have been physically harassed by men. Sweeping social changes have been brought by India's economy growing by 9%. In the past fifteen years, the number of women in the workforce has roughly doubled. There has been more aggressive policing efforts, measures like women-only train cars, and laws that require companies employing women on late night shifts, to arrange car lifts home. But a vast majority of crimes against women go unreported. Successful convictions are central to changing attitudes that tolerate sexual assault.

DOMESTICS OVERSEAS

Working abroad, India's domestic migrant population is nearly 100 million, which primarily represents the poor segments from states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. Domestic migrant remittances to India are a part of capital inflows, and increase India's foreign exchange reserves. The domestic migrants overseas are contributing about 10% of India's GDP. Though the domestic migrants constitute a major chunk of the population, they remain excluded from the financial mainstream, since they represent a socio-economic strata, which is far less affluent and educated. Normally migrant labour keeps shifting base. The upkeep of the families in India, depends on the money remitted from overseas. The hawala system, where brokers receive the money at one end, and their agents pay it at the other end for a minor commission, is the main route for foreign remittances amongst the informal channels. The formal money transfer channels, include banks and postal network. Few people have access to banks for money transfer, since only 9% of India's 600000 villages are covered by banks. The domestic remittance market is valued at \$35 billion.

POLAVARAM DAM

The Orissa State Government feels that the Andhra Pradesh State Government has no right or entitlement, to undertake or proceed with the Polavaram Dam Project on the Godavari river. Embankments are not permanent solutions to effectively contain submergence, during floods. The project is likely to submerge 2120 hectares (approx) of land in Naxalite affected tribal areas of Malkangiri. Flood contributions would arise from design flood of 50 lac cusecs, and the backwater effect along the Sabari and Sileru limbs, flowing through Orissa, into the Godavari in Andhra Pradesh.

NEW BURMESE MPs

Myanmar's State Peace and Development Council had run Myanmar since 1988. Now Myanmar's junta of generals have handed over power to the government elected in Nov 2011 ballot. The same military officers will continue to run the government, notwithstanding the new structure. The outgoing prime minister, Thein Sein, a retired general has been sworn in as the president of the new parliament. The new parliament has announced that the legislative power, jurisdiction power and administrative power being exercised by the State

Peace and Development Council has been transferred to the union level government. The handover to a nominally civilian administration could mark a new start for Myanmar, which has been under military rule for forty nine years. But the New Myanmar government is primarily composed of former generals, and Gen Than Shwe possesses absolute power over the transition, installing allies in all important posts. The network for Democracy and Development, an exile pressure group, feels that there will not be noticeable changes on the ground.

Being pessimistic of a democratic outcome, the National League for Democracy, led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi did not participate in Nov 2010 elections. The National Democratic Force, Myanmar's largest official opposition party, has been allowed to win just 12 of the 698 National Assembly seats in Nov 2010 rigged elections. The leader of the National League for Democracy, Ms Suu Kyi retains enormous respect and admiration for her principled stand against the junta. However, there is a growing feeling among many younger Myanmarese that the politics of confrontation over the past twenty years, have resulted in stalemate. The change may provide new opportunities. The NDF is attempting to introduce a new economic competition bill, aimed at dismantling the monopolies, which have enriched the generals. □□□