The grassroots of the Cuban revolution are the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRS), set up by Fidel Castro in 1960. In 2007, 8.4 million of Cuba's 11 million population, were members of the CDRS. Facing abdominal surgery, Fidel Castro had handed over his powers to his younger brother, Raul Castro, in July 06. Fidel Castro announced his retirement from the posts of Cuba's president and its "commander in chief", in February 08. He ruled Cuba for 49 years with-standing ten US presidents, and their economic embargo against Cuba. Cuba achieved world class health and education sevices under Castro. Though retired as president, Fidel Castro remains first secretary of the Cuban Communist Party. On 24 Feb 08, the council of state elected Raul Castro, aged 76 years, as Cuba's president. Power has been transferred peacefully.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the termination of Russian aid. The United States embargo completed Cuba's economic bank-ruptcy. Between 1989 and 1993, the Cuban economy shrank by about 35%. Fidel Castro had introduced a "Special Period" of sharp austerity and meaningful economic reforms. Mass tourism and foreign investment, mainly in hotels, Nickel mines, telecoms and oil exploration were encouraged. Farmers' markets supplemented inadequate official rations. Family businesses like restaurants, plumbers and electricians were licensed for the first time, since 1960. The dollar became a new source of hard currency, in the form of remittances from the million Cuban-Americans. The "convertible peso" (CUC) replaced the dollar, and is now valued at \$ 1.08. The economy stabilized, and there was a moderate growth of about 5.5%. Barter agreements between Cuba and Venejuela's Hugo Chavez assured 20,000 Cuban doctors, sports trainers and security specialists work in Venejuela. Cuba received from Venezuela 92,000 barrels of oil per day, and aid worth \$ 800 million in 2006, and \$1.5 billion in 2007. A Soviet era oil refinery, near the southern city of Cientuegos was made operational in November 07. Defunct industrial plants, like a rusting fertiliser factory, near the refinery, were restarted. Besides boosting economic growth, Venezuelan aid has over-hauled Cuba's electricity system, 52 million incandescent light bulbs have been replaced with energy saving bulbs. Chinese credit to Cuba, has enlarged Cuba's buses and trucks, with new, more fuel efficient Chinese manufactured transport vehicles.

Political relaxation has emerged since Raul Castro assumed powers. Writers and artists have increased autonomy. More state land has been handed over to family farming, and a debt to dairy farmers paid off. More money is being spent on transport, for purchasing more Chinese buses. Higher autonomy powers are being enjoyed by provincial officials. The decree that workers in foreign companies must pay tax on their unofficial bonuses, allows companies to vary pay according to performance. Cuban communism, derived from a national revolution, is not being dismantled. The "structural and conceptual changes" are strengthening the state institutions. Since Mr Hugo Chavez's stay in office is not indefinite, Venezuelan aid cannot continue for decades. Cuba imported \$1.6 million on food, and imports the greater portion of its fuel. Repeated defaults on foeign debt, have caused restrictions on credit."Popular discontent" could arise from growing inequality. There is a scramble for jobs in tourism or at foreign companies, which grant tips or bonuses.

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Police encounters with left wing guerillas, committed to armed revolution, in Maoist filled Bastar region of Chattisgarh state, have recovered deadly 'agniban' arrows. The arrow heads are filled with potassium fulminate, a primary explosive, which blasts on being hit. Traditional bows and arrows have been updated, with modern technology, fixing explosive "warheads". The fire power of the Maoists has become more lethal. Police have recovered arrows fitted wih "warheads", after recent en-counters in Bijapur, where six security pesonnel and thirteen villagers were killed. Police information points to the ultras manufacturing rocket launchers also. The 'agniban' arrows do not carry any serial number, which makes it difficult to trace the source of supply of the explosives. Between Feb. 06 and Sep. 07, there have been several incidents of looting of explosives and detonators in the Maoist affected Kirandal, Bacheli, and Hirauli areas.

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The union government's Railway budget offered jobs, fare concessions, welfare schemes for railway employees, and facilities for train passengers, keeping in mind target voters, comprising the scheduled castes, scheduled tribals, minorities, women and the 'aam admi' (common man). On the day of the budget (26 Feb 08), thirty seven express and superfast trains (including Patna and Mumbai Rajdhani), were running late. Nowithstanding assurances of no fare hike, a "safety surcharge" as develop-ment cess continues, even after the expiry of the surcharge validity of five years. The surcharge was imposed on passengers, for contributing Rs 5000 crores to the special Railways Safety Fund, which was to have terminated after 2006-07. There are fears of mid-year re-classification to certain reliefs in freight rates for the North-east. The real surplus of the rail budget is Rs 15,000 crores, and not the incorrect claims of Rs 25,000 crores. Rs 4500 crores dividend is to be paid to the finance ministry, and a sundry deduction of Rs 5000 crores, has not been accounted for. About 5000 of the 7800 railway stations, would continue to sell printed tickets, even after closure of 16 printing presses, following computerization of tickets. Five of the presses proposed to be shut down are in West Bengal. The printing job is to be given to private firms.

The India-Myanmar rail link via Manipur was to have been started by 2007-08. Now it is apparent that the project will not be completed on the Indian side, before 2010.