

India census: population goes up to 1.21 billion

India's population has grown by 181m people over the past decade to 1.21bn, according to the 2011 census

More people now live in India than in the United States, Indonesia, Brazil, Pakistan and Bangladesh combined. India is on course to overtake China as the world's most populous nation by 2030, but its growth rate is falling, figures show. China has 1.3bn people. The census also reveals a continuing preference for boys — India's sex ratio is at its worst since independence.

Statistics for the past 10 years show fewer girls than boys are being born or surviving. They show 914 girls were born for every 1,000 boys under the age of six, compared with 927 for every 1,000 boys in 2001 census.

"This is a matter of grave concern," Census Commissioner C. Chandramauli said. Female foeticide remains common in India, although sex-selective abortion



REUTERS

Devotees try to board a train, after taking a holy dip in the Sangam

based on ultrasound scans is illegal. Sons are still seen by many as wage-earners for the future. The population of India now comprises 623.7m males and 586.5m females. Some 2.7m officials visited households in about 7,000 towns and

600,000 villages, classifying the population according to gender, religion, education and occupation. The exercise, conducted every 10 years, faces big challenges, not least India's vast area and diversity of cultures.

Census officials also have to contend with high levels of illiteracy and millions of homeless people — as well as insurgencies by Maoists and other rebels which have left large parts of the country unsafe.

Peru welcomes back Inca artefacts from Yale University



REUTERS

Workers carry archaeological pieces from Machu Picchu

Peru has given a lavish welcome to hundreds of Inca artefacts returned by Yale University in the USA, nearly a century after they were taken from the famed citadel of Machu Picchu

A convoy of trucks escorted by police carried the remains from the airport to the Presidential Palace in Lima. Yale agreed to return the artefacts last year after a long campaign by Peru. President Alan Garcia led the welcoming ceremony. "They are treasures, even though they are not made of gold or precious stones, because they represent the dignity and pride of Peru," he said before there was a gun salute for the artefacts.

The relics will be briefly dis-

played in Lima before being taken to Cuzco — the historical capital of the Inca Empire — where they will be housed in a new cultural centre. The return comes just in time for the centenary of the 'discovery' of Machu Picchu by the American explorer Hiram Bingham in 1912. Peru waged a long diplomatic and legal campaign to recover the artefacts, which it said had only been loaned to Yale.

In all some 45,000 archaeological pieces are to be returned. The 'Lost City' of Machu Picchu in the Andes is Peru's main tourist attraction. It is the most famous monument of the Inca Empire, which ruled until the 15th century Spanish conquest.

Disasters lead to losses

Natural catastrophes and man-made disasters cost the insurance industry \$43bn in 2010, Swiss Re (RUKN.VX), the world's second-biggest reinsurer, say, revising up an earlier estimate

Swiss Re also revised down its estimate of worldwide economic losses from 2010 disasters to \$218bn from a November estimate of \$222bn, still more than triple the 2009 figure of \$68bn. In November, Swiss Re predicted a total cost to insurers of \$36bn

from 2010 disasters.

Its new study showed natural catastrophes cost the industry about \$40bn in 2010, while man-made disasters triggered claims of more than \$3bn, compared to overall insured losses in 2009 of \$27bn. "Insured losses were highest in North America in 2010, where they exceeded \$15bn," said Lucia Bevere, one of the study's authors. "Despite very low hurricane losses due to the absence of hurricanes making direct landfall in the USA, a series of lesser storms throughout the year re-

sulted in this high figure."

Swiss Re said the 2010 earthquakes in Chile and New Zealand were the two costliest events, leading to insured losses estimated at \$8bn and 4.4bn respectively. Swiss Re also reiterated that earthquake losses for 2011 would be above average due to the Japan disaster and also the February earthquake in New Zealand which it estimates to produced total insured claims of \$6-\$12bn. Swiss Re estimated it would face \$1.2bn in claims from the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

Microsoft plans to take Google complaint to EU

Microsoft is to take an anti-competition complaint against Google to the European Commission

The software maker claims that Google used its dominant position in the search market to restrict the growth of Microsoft services. It cites a number of practices, including Google limiting the ability of Microsoft Bing to index Web content. Google said it was not surprised by the move and would happily explain itself.

In a detailed blog, Microsoft's General Counsel, Brad Smith, outlined the company's grievances. He wrote: 'Our filing today focuses on a pattern of actions that Google has taken to entrench its dominance in the markets for online search and search advertising to the detriment of



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European consumers.' The post goes on to list five different ways in which Google, according to Microsoft, has sought to control the search market.

The European Commission launched an investigation into allegations of anti-competitive practices by Google last November, at the behest of several Internet companies, including Ciao, a shopping site owned by Microsoft. It is likely, if the Commission accepts the latest round of complaints from Microsoft, that they would be rolled into the same investigation.

For the Microsoft case to be accepted, the company would have to prove two things — firstly that Google was dominant in a particular market, namely search, and secondly that it had abused that position. In a statement, Google said it would cooperate with any investigation.

Materials prepared with aid of information agencies

MESSENGER back first snapshots of Mercury

After over six years and five billion miles, the Mercury Surface, Space Environment, Geochemistry and Ranging (MESSENGER) probe has finally entered orbit around our solar system's innermost planet

MESSENGER has spent the last six years looking for ways to slow itself down, which involved swinging around Earth, Venus, and even Mercury itself a couple times each along the way to slow down using a bunch of reverse gravity assists.

Mercury is uncomfortably close to the Sun, which makes it more than a little toasty, especially when MESSENGER is sandwiched between the hot surface of the planet on one side and the even hotter Sun on the other. The probe is equipped with a ceramic umbrella on one side to provide shade, and uses solar panels speckled with mirrors to keep them from overheating. It's also in a highly elliptical orbit around Mercury, which gives it a chance to periodically cool off.

Now that MESSENGER has finally made it to Mercury, it's going to start sending back pictures of the 55 percent of the planet that people have never seen before, and peeking into craters around the polar regions of Mercury.