

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

A visitor to India has a lot to choose from, be it in terms of natural beauty, ancient architecture, religious monuments, cuisine and weather. A quick look at a map of India gives us a clear picture of the sheer diversity; we have deserts and sea, snow clad mountains and plains, forests and arid land. Let's take another example of diversity in India – languages. The People's Linguistic Survey of India recently published a report that about 780 languages are spoken in India and about 250 languages have died out in the past 50 years. Twenty two of the 780 languages are scheduled Indian languages. Each of the 29 states and 7 union territories in India has its own shared sense of history, language, cuisine and identity. Scholars have identified different racial groups that exist in India today as a result of immigration thousands of years ago. These groups are namely : Australoids(central and eastern India) , Negritos (Andaman and Nicobar Islands and some tribes in southern India), Mongoloids(north-eastern India) , Mediterranean (south India), Western Bracycephals (Kashmir, Gujarat, Maharashtra) and Nordics(northern India). While some of us take great pride in this diversity , unfortunately there are some who use these identities to drive a wedge in the society.

In this issue of Policy Watch we tackle the rather complex subject of racism and regionalism. The recent spate of attacks on those from North –East India prompted us to write on this subject. The distance that north-easterners feel from the rest of India and vice versa has both racial and regional aspects to it. These attacks have prompted many to demand an anti-racial discrimination law. This also reminds us of the caste and race debate that had taken place. This issue discusses how we perceive the 'others'. We would also like to add here, like caste, race is also an artificial construct. It merely creates an unfair society by giving preference to certain physiological features.

Other stories are a Yale study which shows BJP gains in polls after every riot, decriminalization of suicide, high neonatal deaths in Bihar and the plans to extend MNREGA to textile artisans.

Looking forward to your comments and feedback.

*Dr. Sushree Panigrahi
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COVER STORY

Deconstructing Racism and Regionalism in India

Racial Thinking

India is a country with diverse regions, languages, castes, religions and races. As a nation, India has been in the forefront for propagating values like 'unity in diversity' and pride in multiculturalism, both in the national and international forums. India's contribution to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa can never be forgotten. But in practice, Indians have failed to accept and respect its heterogeneity resulting in the social exclusion of 'others'. This social exclusion is often the result of discrimination based on race or differences based on physical attributes such as colour of the skin, facial structures etc. Race based discrimination or racism is a socially constructed prejudice or belief involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to dominate the 'other' racial group which is inferior.

Though racial discrimination is prohibited by law and may not be practised at the institutional level, but its effects in everyday life are regularly experienced by people from 'other' ethnic groups who live in a different geographical or social landscape. For example, there is an anti-Bihari sentiment across the country, a South Indian is called "Madrasi" and a person from North East is called 'chinki'. These are just few of the many cases. There is also a never ending prejudice against black or dark-skin, always giving preference to a fair-skinned person, in India. This is the prime reason why an African is stereotyped and socially labelled as a drug peddler or a nuisance in our country. Thus, racism in India is rampant and takes varied forms ranging from casual derogatory remark, harsh verbal abuse to severe physical attack. Sometimes they are visible and sometimes they are covert, executed through negative attitude or body language.

To exclude racism, various groups and experts have demanded the enforcement of an exclusive anti-racism law. However this demand is much in debate as the other side of the argument is that racism is a social problem that exists in the minds and attitudes which cannot be addressed unless the minds of the people are connected through integration and promotion of cultures of other ethnic groups. This cover story puts forth both the sides of the debate looking at the issue of racism holistically without being bias to any particular social group.

Injustice inflicted by racism – few examples

Indians often see themselves as victims of racism, inflicted particularly by the West. However time and again, Indians have themselves been perpetrators of race based violence towards others whom they consider as inferior.

State of North Easterners in Metro Cities

Death of a 19 year old student Nido Tania, who was mocked for his hair style and killed in Delhi; physical assault of an engineering student in Bangalore for not speaking Kannada; and attack on two youths by few locals in Gurgaon are still fresh in our memory. Though these are three different tragedies, what is common to all these incidences is the shameful fact that these are racist crimes committed against the North East people in mainland India.

According to a police record, the national capital has witnessed a rise in racial crimes against people from the North Eastern Region (NER). Out of 847 phone calls this year (till mid November), the police received 650 calls concerning racial discrimination against the people from NER. The Bezbaruah Committee that was set up under the chairmanship of Mr. Bezbaruah to look into the racial issues faced by the North Easterners, highlights that over two lakh people have migrated to Delhi from North Eastern states between 2005 and 2013 and about 86% of them have faced some form of racial discrimination.

Anti-Bihari sentiment

There have been several racial attacks against people from Bihar who migrated to other parts of India mainly for employment. However they have been subjected to severe social exclusion in other states. Between 2000 and 2003, anti-Bihari violence led to the deaths of upto 200 people and created 10,000 internal refugees (MS Academic, 2012).

In February 2008, migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who settled in Mumbai for jobs were charged of being 'infiltrators' and accused of spoiling the Maharashtrian culture. Though the violence was politically driven, the fundamental problem was that they were not "Marathi manush", and considered as an "unwelcome lot" by few political leaders in Maharashtra. Consequently, many

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migrants fled away from the state. Orchestrated riots and anti-migrant political campaigns routinely target migrants from other states and protest their presence in the city, even today.

Outsiders vs Tribals in North East

There have been series of massacres and bomb attacks on migrants from other states even in the North East. In the aftermath of one such violence in 2007, thousands of labourers from Hindi speaking region fled from Assam. Discrimination and violence faced by 'outsiders' or 'non-tribals' in the North East have continued for a very long time, resulting in declining population of 'non-tribals' in Meghalaya, from 20% when the state was formed to below 10% (Tehelka).

An 'outsider' is called a 'Dkhar' in Khasi, a pejorative term for an 'outsider'. The non-tribals have been accused of deteriorating the Khasi culture. Slogan like "Khasi by birth, Indian by accident" is used by locals against people from other ethnic groups including Bengalis, Nepalis, and Biharis. Arjun Rajkhowa, a PhD scholar in Media Studies and Politics writes in his article 'Racism and the NE – Exclusion and prejudice', "If 'Chinese' is used pejoratively for North Easterners, 'Indian' is also used as a term of derogation in the northeast."

Targeting 'Black'

African nationals are stereotyped as drug peddlers or sex workers in India. They are made victims of derogatory remarks like 'negro' or 'kale' (black), physically abused on the streets, charged high rent by landlords and are also made victims of administrative (like police) apathy.

The most recent demonstration of this is the brutal assault of three African students in one of the metro stations of Delhi. These students protested being photographed by few local youths. In response, the African students were attacked by the locals and alleged of misbehaving with a woman, without any evidence. The victims sought police protection, but in vain. One of the victims, Yohan writes in the Times Of India, "We were travelling in metro, and a few guys started clicking our pictures. On asking them about why they were doing that, they started misbehaving and that ultimately led the metro staff to take us and those guys to the police officer's cabin. Even there, they kept passing racist comments which made us furious too. From there, the heat kept building upon and ultimately led to a fight. We were beaten up badly by a majority of people around us at that time."

Anti Racism Law in India: the debate

Need for an anti racism law

Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits any race-based discrimination by the state. Such a fundamental right like Article 15 guarantees protection to victims of racial crimes committed by the state but fails to guarantee protection from private individuals. Additionally, anti-discrimination legislation also fails to acknowledge racism that is 'invisible' and executed through certain tone or gesture.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is one of the foremost anti-discrimination legislations in India. Under the law, an accused can end up spending five years in jail and could be denied anticipatory bail. In case the police fail to act on a complaint, he/ she could be imprisoned for a term which should not be less than six months and may be extended to a year. Though the act protects significant number of persons from the North-East as majority belong to the Scheduled Tribes, it fails to protect non tribal from the region and other communities in India who are victims of xenophobia.

Recognising the gaps in the existing domestic laws and rampant racial discrimination experienced by ethnic minorities especially the North Easterners in mainland India, there have been demands for an anti-racism law from various groups and activists.

The prospects of an anti racism law should be looked at holistically, such that it is able to tackle the issue and protect the interests of every vulnerable individual and group, both national and non-nationals, without being biased towards a particular group. One has to also see whether an exclusive law like this can eradicate every form of racism? Xenophobic exclusions and other forms of ethnicity-based discrimination are legally forbidden in the United States, yet it continues to be reflected in socioeconomic inequalities like employment opportunities, homeownership, income levels etc. There exists a disparity in homeownership between African-Americans and the Whites, which is an indicator of the racial wealth gap, according to a recent study from Brandeis University. According to the authors of the report "redlining [a form of discrimination in banking or insurance practices], discriminatory mortgage-lending practices, lack of access to credit, and lower incomes have blocked the homeownership path for

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African-Americans while creating and reinforcing communities segregated by race.” In the United States, racism has taken on more modern, indirect forms of expression, most prevalently as ‘symbolic racism’ (Sears and Henry, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2003).

The other side of the debate- need to strengthen existing legislations

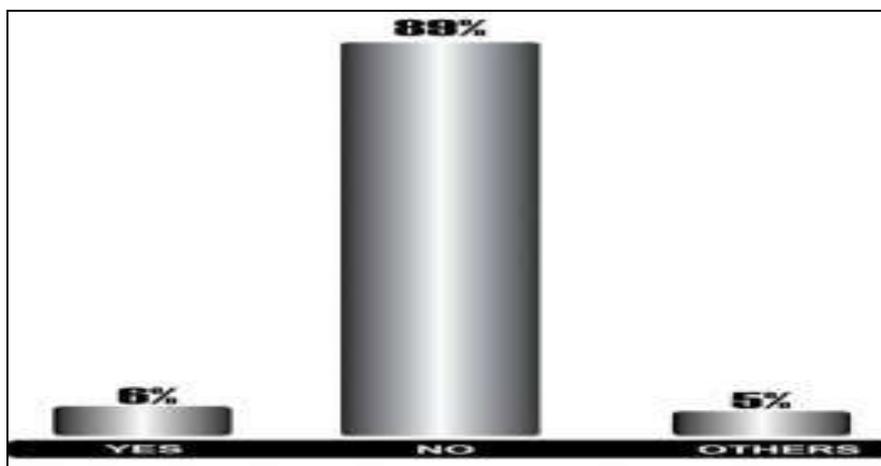


Figure 1 : Survey Poll " Will an Anti-Racism Law Protect the Rights of People from North East?"

Source: The Morung Express

Contrary to the advocates of anti-racism law in India, there are activists and groups who suggest correcting and strengthening existing legislations on anti discrimination. According to Mr. Bezbaruah, the chairperson of the Bezbaruah Committee, “We need a quicker solution because these crimes are increasing rapidly, when they should be decreasing.” In his views, the “introduction of fresh legislation would be lengthy; the government must consider swift reform of existing laws.”

The Bezbaruah committee recommended adding sections to India’s Penal Code, including making a “word, gesture or act intended to insult a member of a particular group or of any race, punishable with a maximum of three year jail sentence and a fine.” The other recommendation from the

committee includes setting up designated courts to deal with racial conflicts, making Police more responsible and increasing role of media, NGOs, private sector in addressing the issue together. Promotion of other cultures and spreading awareness amongst people about various social groups and culture is necessary to curb the problem.

In a survey poll carried out by the Morung Express, a Nagaland based newspaper, majority of the people said an anti racism law is unlikely to protect the people of North East from racial discrimination (Figure 1). “Racism is a social problem and it can only be solved at the societal level.” Awareness, campaigns, educating the mainland people about the unique history, culture, languages of north-east India, would help the people of mainland India to accept them as one of them. “Only a paradigm shift in societal attitude will minimise racial discrimination.” (Views of the people from survey poll).

Racism is a social problem

Any form of racism, from a snide remark to an assault, fosters inequality in society. This discrimination originates from intolerance towards other cultures to faulty prejudices against them. Since the ethnic minority or an individual belong to a different social landscape, their behaviour and lifestyle is absolutely unknown to others who develop wrong perceptions about them. Like, for example, “compared to an average North Indian, the people from North East are more fluent in English. Their dressing styles and entertainments are also different (more close to those of South East Asian and Western societies than mainland India). All these aspects lead to the formation of faulty notions regarding the social life of the migrants from the region, which inter alia are used for labeling them as socially inferior.”(V.V Giri National Labour Institute).

There is an utmost need to address the problem not just through legal discourse but also through **sensitising people** about other ethnic groups and cultures. It is essential to deconstruct faulty perception and half truth that have been passed on through incorrect narratives. Role of universities, media, sports and tourism become crucial in creating awareness and integrating people (both national and non-nationals) of different background.

Racism in India has a very long history and it is continuing, however there has been lack of **voice against such injustice**. We all have to accept our share of the responsibility in supporting racism either by pretending that it does not exist or by preferring to stay silent on the issue. There has to be zero tolerance towards racial discrimination not because it is against ‘our’ people but

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because it is against human dignity. Academics, thinkers, artists, writers, activists, journalists, professionals and students must challenge any form of discrimination through debates, discussions, writings, complains and protests.

Strengthening law enforcement agencies and institutional support also becomes significant. Attitude of the police, who are often charged of harassing victims of racial slurs, needs to change. As also recommended by the Bezbaruah Committee, concerned state and central government bodies like state bhawans, should play a more proactive role in providing support to migrants on various aspects –information about the place of destination, counselling the new comers; career guidance; provision of legal support in times of need. Fast track courts should be set up in States, exclusively to handle crimes committed on grounds of race.

Time to put an end to ‘Racism’

India's contribution to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa has been highly acknowledged globally. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, as a national ideology, India has shown an uncompromising attitude towards any form of institutional racism. However this pride and India's own freedom struggle becomes meaningless as long as racism exists, even if at an individual level.

Racism is a form of exploitation and it will continue to exist as long as we deal with the problem half heartedly. Resorting to legalistic means cannot be ignored, but complete eradication of this problem is only possible when people develop solidarity towards their countrymen and also non-nationals, by destroying artificial differences on the grounds of culture, language, physical features and colour.

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HEADLINES

Gujarat Records 48,000 Sick MSME Units, Second Only to Uttar Pradesh

(Avinash Nair, *The Financial Express*, December 9, 2014)

The Gujarat state government is putting all efforts to promote Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), even through the upcoming seventh edition of Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit 2015. However, against this backdrop, data released by the Union Ministry for MSMEs on Monday show that there are over 48,000 sick units in Gujarat. This accounts for nearly one-fifth of the total MSMEs registered with the state government. According to data compiled by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) from scheduled commercial banks, Gujarat has a total of 48,000 sick MSME units (end of March 2014). This puts the state only behind Uttar Pradesh in the list.

In fact, the number of sick MSME units in Gujarat has more than doubled in a span of 12 months. At the end of March 2013, the number of sick units in the state was just 20,452 units. The numbers of sick units in 2012 (107 units) and 2011 (4321 units) when compared with the figure for March 2014 give a clear picture of deteriorating financial condition of the MSMEs in the state. The ticket size of loans given to MSMEs in Gujarat is anywhere between Rs 1 to Rs 2.5 crore. Every year, more and more is being loaned out to MSMEs in the state but the quantum of Non-Performing Assets is steadily on a rise. A survey conducted by the Vibrant Gujarat government just before the 2013 edition of the Vibrant Gujarat summit showed that closure rate of MSMEs in Gujarat was at five percent.

Though the financial condition of exiting units has been deteriorating, the number of MOUs (memorandum of understanding) signed by MSME units during the Vibrant Gujarat summit have been on a rise. According to state figures from the MSME division of Industries Commissioner Office, Gujarat, 2009 saw 1921 MoUs being signed, which increased to 4494 and 12886 during the 2011 and 2013 editions of the summit. Even in the coming summit of Vibrant Gujarat, MSMEs of Gujarat stands to be a dominant theme. Apart from Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu (43,743 units), Maharashtra (43000) and Andhra Pradesh (41845 units) were among the top five states having the maximum number of sick MSME units. There are a total of over 4 lakh sick MSME units in the country as on March 2014 that need attention.

<http://www.financialexpress.com/article/economy/gujarat-clocks-over-48000-sick-msme-units-in-2014/17171/>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

Restructuring of Planning Commission Favoured by Most CMs

(*The Hindu*, December 7, 2014)

A consultation meeting was convened by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on deciding the nature of the body that should replace the Planning Commission. On August 13, 2014 the Cabinet decided to repeal the March 15, 1950 Resolution by which the Planning Commission was established. Most Chief Ministers (CM) favoured restructuring the Planning Commission instead of scrapping it. During the meeting the Centre and the States failed to agree whether the Five Year plans and Annual State plans be continued or ended.

As per the Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley there was consensus on three issues viz. strengthening of federalism, giving increased powers to States and providing them increased flexibility to implement schemes and programmes. He added that, "All States agreed that the principle of one-size-fits-all as far as the design and format of schemes and programmes go does not work."

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/prime-minister-narendra-modis-planning-commission-revamp-meeting-with-chief-ministers/article6670028.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 08.12.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

Confining MGNREGS to the Poorest Districts Unhelpful as per Survey

(*The Hindu*, December 8, 2014)

Many reports suggested that the Union government was considering limiting the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to India's 200 poorest districts. Chaudhary Birender Singh, the Rural Development Minister, albeit said no such decision has yet been taken.

However, the question emerges whether limiting MGNREGS to the 200 poorest districts of the country would benefit the neediest? As per yet-to-be-published data from the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) 2011-12, this will not be the case as there is little difference between the 200 poorest districts and other 476 districts of India in terms of indicators of marginalisation.

The IHDS report, conducted by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the University

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of Maryland, also highlights that better-off districts house about 70% of poor people in India. This reveals that the 200 poorest districts and the rest have similar levels of marginalised population.

According to Ms. Sonalde Desai, senior fellow at NCAER, “Results from the IHDS suggest that targeting districts is likely to be ineffective and that it may be better to target households.”

28 economists recently wrote to the Prime Minister stating that limiting MGNREGS would “run against a fundamental premise of the Act: gainful employment that affords basic

economic security is a human right.”

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/limiting-job-scheme-to-poorest-districts-will-not-help-finds-survey/article6670952.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 09.12.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

ECONOMIC

Macro Economic Dimension of India: Inflation Rates for the Month of December, 2014

General Inflation Rates in Indian States: December, 2014 (%)

States	Rural	Urban	General
All India	4.02	4.69	4.30
Northern Region			
Jammu & Kashmir	4.02	4.19	4.11
Himachal Pradesh	3.81	3.37	3.67
Punjab	4.40	4.06	4.27
Chandigarh	3.39	4.71	4.64
Uttarakhand	3.68	2.12	3.16
Haryana	3.05	4.09	3.47
Delhi	-1.16	2.46	2.32
Uttar Pradesh	4.35	4.13	4.33
Western Region			
Rajasthan	5.40	3.73	4.77
Gujarat	3.77	3.58	3.62
Maharashtra	4.78	4.72	4.73
Goa	6.13	4.88	5.50
Lakshadweep	9.54	3.90	6.43
Daman & Die	6.32	7.12	6.64
Dadra Nagar & Haveli	1.82	3.00	2.12
Central Region			
Madhya Pradesh	3.74	4.08	3.81
Chattishgarh	2.64	4.17	3.10
Southern Region			
Andhra Pradesh	2.87	4.87	3.60
Karnataka	3.79	7.64	5.81
Kerala	6.42	8.41	7.11
Tamil Nadu	4.53	6.70	5.79
Puducherry	4.18	5.39	5.04
Andaman & Nicobar Island	9.29	3.47	6.35
Northeastern Region			
Arunachal Pradesh	5.08		
Assam	3.36	6.63	3.96
Manipur	1.03	4.57	2.23
Meghalaya	13.69	9.11	12.70
Mizoram	4.96	4.04	4.51
Nagaland	11.54	13.60	9.94
Tripura	10.20	7.73	9.52
Sikkim	3.79	7.72	4.57
Eastern Region			
Bihar	4.74	3.63	4.57
Jharkhand	0.34	2.46	1.04
West Bengal	2.08	3.50	2.70
Odisha	4.61	4.24	4.48

All – India Inflation rate has come down from 7.86% in the month of August to 6.46% in the month of September 2014 along with its rural and urban decline. Amongst the states also the inflation rate has come down except for few states like Kerala, where its rural and combined rates have gone high from its previous month. Similarly in Odisha and Gujarat, the combined inflation rate has gone high from the previous month. For the month of September, Meghalaya has seen highest inflation with 14.30% and Andhra Pradesh has seen lowest inflation with 4.53%.

Source: State-wise monthly inflation rates are estimated from year on year Consumer Price Index (CPI) data of MOSPI. There is one month time lag in CPI data (New Series 2010=100) provided by MOSPI, Government of India.

ECONOMIC

Make in India – Losing its Steam

(Subrata Majumder, *The Millennium Post*, December 8, 2014)

This article brings out the fact that ‘Make in India’ initiative is basically a set of existing policies. Notwithstanding all the hope of a better climate for investors and for India attracting huge sums of money, the initiative offers little. An important aspect of the ‘Make in India’ initiative was the idea of easing bureaucratic procedures, which would lure investors to expand in India. Some of the key barriers to enhanced foreign investment are non-transparent tax system, delay in the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax regime and a reluctance towards allowing multi-brand retail to make its way into India.

Though twenty five industries have been highlighted in the ‘Make in India’ campaign, the special characteristics of each industry have not been highlighted. In the absence of detailed assessments, the government will invariably fail to create an environment wherein domestic industries will move to a position where they have a comparative advantage over their foreign competitors. Key domestic sectors like leather, defence, oil and natural gas, mining and space present a limited scope to woo investors, despite exponential potential for growth in the world economy. With no guarantees of purchase from the government, even the FDI in defence is unlikely to stir up investor sentiment. Export of arms and ammunition are subject to stringent regulations and are applicable to national Ordinance Factories. An investment spree in oil and natural gas production is unlikely, since the country possesses deficient amounts of oil reserves. Private investors in refineries are disillusioned with heavy government subsidies on petroleum products.

‘Make In India’ does not offer any new fiscal incentives, which is a basic investor demand. Business taxes in India are one of the highest in the world, at 33 per cent corporate tax and 26- 28 percent custom duty. With per capita income reeling under low levels, combined with high business taxes, large domestic demand in the country also remains ineffective. However, the Prime Minister believes large and sustainable middle class market in India should be a magnet that woos investors. However, these policies need a rethink and due comparisons with the economies that have been successful in attracting investors before making sweeping assumptions and half-baked initiatives.

<http://www.millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=88058>

Date Accessed: 11.12.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

Huge Cuts in Social Sector Spending for 2015-16

(Jitendra, *Down to Earth*, December 5, 2014)

Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) has directed the Ministry of Finance to prioritize infrastructure works by cutting funds for social sectors. In the upcoming 2015-16 budget, priority is being given to ministries of shipping, road and transport, telecom and power.

The Finance Ministry has attributed these cuts to increasing Current Account Deficit (CAD). However, the CAD has been lower this year as compared to last year. Moreover, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) noted in the first week of December that the CAD is at a ‘reasonably comfortable’ zone.

Sources indicate that the Ministry of Rural Development is likely to see a cut of INR 15,000 crore even with encouraging performance of its schemes. Several media reports have already highlighted cuts to schemes such as MGNREGA and PMGSY. Even the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation is likely to see a cut of about INR 5000 crores. This has raised questions about the dedication to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan campaign of the government. Other ministries likely to face cuts include Ministry of Health and family Welfare which may see budget squeeze of INR 7,000 crore.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/pmo-orders-huge-cuts-social-sector-spending-2015-16>

Date Accessed: 11.12.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

Around 55% of Land Bank in SEZs Vacant in Tamil Nadu

(*Rediff*, December 10, 2014)

Owing to various reasons, including a perceived economic slowdown, around 55 per cent of land in the 36 operational special economic zones (SEZs) in Tamil Nadu is lying vacant. AK Choudhary, development commissioner - commerce and industry ministry, said, “Of the 56 notified SEZs in Tamil Nadu, around 36 were operational in which, almost 50-55 per cent of the land bank was vacant. Around 2,600 acres of land bank was available in these SEZs.”

Many tax disputes are also under consideration where the state government had imposed taxes on companies in the SEZs. However, these disputes have not hampered investments in a big way. The SEZs in Tamil Nadu posted an export turnover of Rs 79,556 crore during 2013-14. Of this, the IT sector accounted for around Rs 50,000 crore. Employment stood at 269,000. However, takers for SEZs in

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Tier II and III cities are even lower compared with the expectations, with 30 per cent occupancy.

Of the 36 SEZs, the government owns only one (MEPZ-SEZ in Chennai) while the rest had been developed by private players. The Centre is developing more IT SEZs and a 50,000 sft of IT space is being created at Hosur and Salem. Although it is assumed that as the industry experiences growth, the SEZs too would grow, this kind of revival seems due only in a long time.

<http://www.rediff.com/business/report/around-55-land-bank-of-sezs-in-tamil-nadu-lying-vacant/20141210.htm/>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

Current Account Deficit Increases from \$5.2 Billion to \$10.1 Billion

(*NDTV*, December 08, 2104)

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data shows that the Current Account Deficit (CAD) soared to \$10.1 billion, comprising of 2.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), compared to the previous year's \$5.2 billion or 1.2% of the GDP. The balance of payment came down from \$11.2 billion in the previous quarter to \$6.9 billion during the quarter of July-September.

Gold imports doubled from \$3.9 billion to \$7.6 billion due to easing of restrictions on imports. Gold imports comprise of second biggest burden on trade balance after imports of oil.

Rupa Rege Nitsure, Chief Economist of Bank of Baroda said that policymakers should look at these events as early warning signs. Unpredictable fluctuations in oil prices and surging gold imports do not allow for complacency.

<http://profit.ndtv.com/news/economy/article-current-account-deficit-widens-to-10-1-billion-in-july-september-710252>

Date Accessed: 09.12.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE**295 Infrastructure Projects Delayed; Cost Overrun at Rs 1 Lakh Crore***(Asian Age, December 5, 2014)*

The planning minister has informed Parliament that 295 infrastructure sector projects worth Rs 150 crore or more are delayed with total cost overrun of Rs 1,01,436 crore. According to the 346 Flash Report of August 2014 released by the ministry of Statistics out of 720 central sector infrastructure sector projects costing Rs 150 crore and above, 295 projects were delayed.

Out of 295 delayed projects, 62 have overall delay in the range of 1-12 months, 66 projects have delay in the range of 13-24 months, 98 projects have delay in the range of 25-60 months and 69 projects have delay of 61 months and above. The original cost of the 295 delayed projects is Rs 5,48,838 crore and anticipated cost is Rs 6,50,274 crore, thus leading to a total cost overrun of Rs 1,01,436 crore.

The road sector accounted for the maximum number of 92 delayed projects with total cost overrun of Rs 1,975 .Followed by 43 delayed projects in the petroleum sector with total cost overrun of Rs 16,320 crore. The railway sector in this regard is not far behind with as many as 32 projects being delayed.

<http://www.asianage.com/business/295-infrastructure-projects-held-cost-overrun-rs-1-lakh-crore-147>

Date Accessed:7.12.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

Rural Job Scheme Spend Unchanged, Government May Tweak Structure, Coverage*(Liz Mathew, Financial express, December 5, 2014)*

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government is likely to retain the fund allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), the flagship programme of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), in the Union Budget 2015-16. The government could still look at tweaking the labour-material ratio under the scheme from the current 60:40 ratio as well as focus on creation of more productive and durable capital assets.

Launched in 2005 by the UPA government with cross-party support, the scheme aims to guarantee 100 days of wage employment to adult members of every rural household who

volunteer to do unskilled work. With the Centre trying to meet its fiscal deficit target of 4.1 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014-15, few economists also have expressed fears that there could be reduction in the social sector spending.

There were suggestions that scheme could be limited for implementation only in backward districts or 500 blocks. The finance minister during his budget speech had said that “wage employment would be provided under MGNREGA through works that are more productive, asset creating and substantially linked to agriculture and allied activities.” Newly appointed minister for rural development, panchayati raj and drinking water and sanitation, too, has maintained in the parliament that the government will not restrict the job scheme.

<http://www.financialexpress.com/article/economy/rural-job-scheme-spend-unchanged-govt-may-tweak-structure-coverage/15897/>

Date Accessed: 6.12.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

Should We Make in India or in Bharat
(Pradeep S Mehta, Business line, December 4, 2014)

The Make in India campaign seems to be focused on big industries in big cities. Rather than looking into micro, small and medium enterprises in rural India. More than 65 per cent of rural labour is engaged in non-farm livelihood activities, or the Rural Non-Farm Economy (RNFE) in the country. The majority of rural labour is involuntarily engaged in low-skill, low-paid, tertiary-level jobs. This situation can be improved if a synergy is created between Make in India and Make in Bharat. RNFE consists of all non-agricultural activities in rural areas: from household and non-household manufacturing to trade and commerce and other services. At present, this sector is dominated by tertiary activities. One of the major development challenges is to create an enabling environment for the growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized manufacturing and service enterprises in rural areas.

The RNFE sector is not particularly dependent on government incentives. It is driven by the entrepreneurial spirit of the rural people. At the same time, due to infrastructural problems (such as bad or no roads and inadequate power) and weak marketing linkages, micro, small and medium-sized manufacturing units are unable to realise their potential for horizontal and vertical expansion. There must be special emphasis on setting up agro-based industries and encouraging large-scale production of mass commodities. The effective implementation of the manufacturing policy and the foreign trade policy can strengthen the synergy between Make in India and Make in

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Bharat.

Over the last two decades, China has pursued rural industrialisation at great speed through the development of township and village enterprises (TVEs) that led to China becoming the factory of the world. India could learn from the successes and shortcomings of TVEs to realise the goals of Make in India and Make in Bharat. Unlike China, India is a democratic, quasi-federal country, and therefore the Centre will have to incentivise the states and create awareness in the states to join this twin campaign.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/should-we-make-in-india-or-in-bharat/article6662126.ece>

Date Accessed: 7.12.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

Centre Plans to Extend MNREGS to Textile Artisans

(Kanchan Srivastava, *dna*, 10 December, 2014)

The Bhartiya Janta Party led National Democratic Alliance government is planning to incorporate textile artisans into Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MNREGS). The rationale behind the move is to stop the trend where artisans abandon weaving which requires special skills and instead join the unskilled labour force to avail the higher monetary remunerations provided under the scheme.

Union Minister for textiles Santosh Gangwar has confirmed this development and said that this move will prevent the loss of these skills among the future generations of artisans. He also said, that artisans prefer to work for MNREGA as they get Rs 150 a day for next to no work under the scheme, but by bringing artisans under the scheme for making handloom or crafts work their skills and traditional work can be safeguarded.

The government may also extend this benefit to other sectors in rural India. "MNREGS ensures 'right to work' by offering a minimum of 100 days of work per year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The wages differ from state to state and are revised time to time as per the consumer price index for agricultural labour (CPIAL). At present the MNREGS wages range from Rs150-Rs175 a day while many artisans earn less than Rs100 a day."

However, textile labour unions have condemned the government's move unanimously. Dutta Iswalkar of the Textile Labour Union of Mumbai has said that the move is short-sighted, since textile workers need wages much higher than the amounts offered under the MNREGS. According to

the weavers the main problems that the textile industry faces today are the uneven supply of yarns, power cuts and meagre returns. The above mentioned move by the government doesn't address any of these problems. The government needs to improve infrastructure within the existing facilities and provide incentives to the industry to better the lot of textile workers across the country.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-centre-plans-to-extend-mnregs-to-textile-artisans-2042581>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014

(Rohit Chauhan)

43 per cent of Government Employees don't have Perks of Government Job

(Subhomoy Bhattacharjee, Arun Sharma, *Indian Express*, December 9, 2014)

The data quoted here is based on a research report by Indian Staffing Federation and Indicus Analytics in collaboration with NSSO and other government pays and accounts department.

"Nearly 43 per cent of all government employees in India are holding a temporary post, with no long-term benefits such as a provident fund to fall back on." This can be the result of government departments hiring more and more people on a contractual basis to cost cut on employment benefits. It can also be deduced from this data that the often cited measure of reducing retirement age wouldn't affect almost 50 per cent of its employees. "Correspondingly, impact on savings in government wage bill will be muted. This is because almost every second government employee, including ones in central, state and public sector organisations, holds a job contract of less than three years." Across the country a majority of government employees don't even hold such a contract.

The formal sector employment in India amounts for around 50 million jobs out of which some form of government service constitute 58 per cent. Out of this 58 per cent, that is 29 million jobs, more than 12 million are contract based which have a service period of three years at most. These employees never get the same benefits as the permanent employees. However, any government data on employment only includes permanent employees which leave contractual employees out of the purview of the government. According to the last census there are 3.4 million permanent employees in government services and 0.4 million temporary staff. Laveesh Bhandari the former director of Indicus has said that reducing retirement age would only lead to recruitment of more short-term workers. Former expenditure secretary in Finance Ministry Sushma Nath has indicated that "fiscal deficit constraints were one of the reasons why state

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governments increased their temporary staff strength.” Rituparna Chakraborty of Indian Staffing Federation indicates that temporary workers have no employment security, since the only financial assurance is the salary they earn. “The data showed that less than 4 per cent of the temporary workers came from firms which offered to hold them as employees while hiring them out to government departments.”

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/43-per-cent-of-govt-employees-dont-have-perks-of-govt-job/99/>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014

(Rohit Chauhan)

Judicial Breach: Pharmaceuticals Bad Karma

(Deevakar Anand, *governance now*, December 8, 2014)

November saw a meeting called ‘Innovation Dialog’ being organized by the Intellectual Property Owners Association (IPOA) in Delhi and Chennai which hosted the judiciary and staff from Delhi high court and Supreme Court of India and also officers from the Intellectual Appellate Board (IPAB). The IPOA is US lobbying group for pharmaceutical companies based in Washington and such a meeting raises the question of conflict of interest since many of these companies are involved in disputes over patent rights in the country. For example Bristol Myers has a case pending in the Delhi High court over the anti-cancer drug Dasatinib; the next hearing in the case is scheduled for December 1, 2014. Scherring Corporation has a similar case over an anti Hepatitis drug Pegylated interferon alpha 2 B. Other such companies include Roche, Mylan, and Pfizer which have disputes pending in courts or with the IPAB.

Public health activists called this meeting an attempt to influence the judiciary and further the interest of IPOA companies. IPOA regularly keeps India on a list of countries that have been ineffective at enforcing patent rights of transnational companies. These “attempts to influence judiciary were encouraged by an understanding between Indian prime minister Narendra Modi and US president Barack Obama in October for constituting a high-level working group on intellectual property rights (IPR).”

Ever since the SC refused to grant the patent rights over the anti-cancer drug Glevic to the Swiss company Novartis AG the IPOA has stepped up its effort to protect its patents in India. The market share on anti-cancer drug is set to grow from 2,000 crore in 2013 to Rs 3,881 in 2017. By organising these meetings the US companies want to put in IPR to capitalise on the growth in market share of these drugs. In the past Justice Dalveer Bhandari of the SC didn’t hear a patent plea of Novartis, following protests about his being

an attendant of two international conferences organised by the IPOA for judges. “In 2010, activists criticised a judges’ roundtable on IPR adjudication; its organisers were the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Maharashtra State Judicial Academy. Public health activists say judiciary should not associate with industry bodies like FICCI that lobby the interests of the pharma industry, including strong IPR protection.”

Kalyani Menon-Sen of The Campaign for Affordable Trastuzumab, a group that defends the rights of cancer patients, condemns the meeting on the same ground that the IPOA is lobbying for the enforcement of IPR in India. They group has written to the Chief Justice of India, Chief Justice of Delhi high court and the IPAB to cancel any such meeting with the IPOA since it violates the fundamental principles of justice and judicial ethics.

<http://www.governancenow.com/news/regular-story/judicial-breach-pharmas-bad-karma>

Date Accessed: 11.12.2014

(Rohit Chauhan)

GOVERNMENT

Maharashtra Government’s Move to Cut Expenditure by 40% will Impact Infra, Social Sectors

(Sanjay Jog, *Business Standard*, December 9, 2014)

The current Maharashtra government on Monday, December 8th, explained ‘stress on the state finances’ as the possible factor for their decision to cut plan expenditure by 40%. This cut is expected to severely impact the infrastructure development and social sectors. But they ensured there won’t be any cut in the salary or pensions, which accounts for an estimated expenditure of Rs 83,590 crore for 2014-15. This 40% cut is expected to impact some of schemes announced by the previous Congress-NCP (Nationalist Congress Party) government. The schemes include ‘Strengthening of power distribution, road development, improvement in water supply schemes, completion of long pending irrigation projects, up-gradation of health infrastructure and implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The implementation of those schemes will either be deferred till March or will be launched after April or scrapped forever.’

Revenue Minister Eknath Khadse said, “Expenditure on various schemes will be deferred till March next year and only after review it will be done in next financial year.” In addition, he clarified that various projects and schemes announced by the previous government will be kept on hold

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or scrapped for lack of funds since an additional loan of Rs 52,000 crore is required to implement those schemes.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/politics/maharashtra-govt-s-move-to-cut-expenditure-by-40-will-impact-infra-social-sectors-114120800195_1.html

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014
(Shruti Issar)

SECURITY**70% Chattisgarh Naxal Surrenders are Neither 'Naxal' Nor 'Surrenders'**

(Punjab Star News, December 07, 2014)

A total of 377 alleged Maoists surrendered in Bastar between June and November. However, police records show that at least 270 of them were ordinary villagers or routine criminals and not "surrendered Maoists." Over 80% of them continue to live in villages. Bastar Inspector General S.R.P. Kalluri claimed that, "By surrenders Maoists develop a sense of belonging with police. Others will follow their example, we will get bigger cadres." However, contrary to his claims branding villagers as Naxals leaves them open to future harassment.

None of the 377 surrendered with a weapon and none got post-surrender relief or rehabilitation. A committee at the Raipur Police Headquarters, headed by the ADG (Special Intel Bureau), scrutinizes every case and decides which one gets a rehabilitation package.

"A surrendered Naxal is entitled to an "immediate grant" of at least Rs 1.5 lakh by the Centre and Rs 1 lakh by the state, a monthly stipend of Rs 4,000 for maximum 36 months, besides cash award between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 1 crore depending on his or her designation." However, only around 100 persons have received about Rs. 2000- Rs.5000 as 'Protsahan Rashi' or encouragement amount till now.

Gudss Usendi, the spokesperson of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee of Maoists, accused the Chhattisgarh police of pocketing the entitled reward amount from Naxal surrenders.

<http://punjabstarnews.com/70-chhattisgarh-naxal-surrenders-are-neither-naxal-nor-surrenders/.html>

Date Accessed: 09.12.2014
(Afreen Faridi)

Centre Grants Rs 350 cr to Boost Andaman Maritime Security

(Sujit Nath, *milleniumpost*, 10 December, 2014)

The NDA government is planning to set up a radar station, jetty and an airstrip at Landfall Islands in Andaman and Nicobar islands. A decision would be taken on National Security Advisor Ajit Doval's presentation to the Prime Minister regarding "the security proposals regarding the environmental issues". A meeting was recently held in the capital between the NSA, the Navy and the Coast Guard to discuss maritime security. The NSA's visit to the islands comes as a result of Prime Minister Modi concern over the defence facilities at Landfall Islands.

Landfall Island is strategically important because of its proximity to Malacca Straits, which is very important for trade across South East Asia. "As per statistic over 60,000 ships use the Malacca Straits annually both ways carrying critical energy products and also other items for trade and commerce." Of late Government sources have voiced this concern. The NDA government has already given the go ahead for the construction of a radar station which will be monitored by the Indian Coast Guard and an air strip besides a jetty. "The estimate cost to improve the maritime security involving Coast Guard, Navy, Air Force and local administration in the first phase will cost approximately Rs 350 Crore."

This development should boost India's monitoring capacity of Chinese naval activity in the North Andaman Sea and around Coco islands. This will also check the presence of drugs and arms runners in the area. At a time when China has successfully made its presence felt in ports around India, whether that be at Chittagong in Bangladesh, Sittwe and Coco islands in Myanmar, Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Gwadar in Pakistan creating this new infrastructure can India some leverage.

<http://www.millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=88380>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014
(Rohit Chauhan)

EDUCATION**Enrolment in Primary Schools Drops after RTE Enforced**

(Free Press Journal, December 10, 2014)

The current official data of Ministry of Human Resources Development reveals a decline in number of student in

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public elementary education institutions. Official data of enrollment in the country's 13 lakh government and aided primary schools shows that the number of students studying in these schools fell from 13.34 crore in 2010 to 13.24 crore in 2013-14, a drop of 10 lakhs.

According to the ministry, the students' exodus from these schools instead of more enrolment is attributed to the rise in people's living standards and their aspirations. These schools offer education only in the local language that may be Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, etc., while the parents are shifting their wards to the private schools that offer education in the English medium. A report by NGO Pratham in January had also noted preference to private schools fast picking up in many states, with Kerala sending as much as 70 per cent of its children to private schools despite a good public infrastructure. It noted that a study done in 2013 showed that just 18.19 per cent of children in government schools could do basic subtraction compared with 44.6 per cent in private schools, a reason why parents are shifting their wards to private schools.

The article published in Free Press Journal, has reported that the Ministry is trying to explain this dropout in enrollment with the provisions of Right to Education (RTE) Act, enforced in April 2010. The Ministry sources said the RTE Act's requirement of education in the local language may be relaxed to let the government and aided private schools get grants even for classes in the English medium. In many states, the falling number of students in the government and aided schools has triggered a new phenomenon of merger of the low-enrollment schools to cut costs.

<http://freepressjournal.in/enrolment-in-primary-schools-drops-after-rte-enforced/#sthash.HCb2LT4h.dpuf>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014

(Jeet Singh)

RSS Building Pressure for 'Nationalist' Education

(Free Press Journal, December 10, 2014)

The RSS and its allied organizations are building pressure for a 'nationalist' school education. A two-day conclave of RSS-linked organizations held in Nagpur last month has been seen as a process of pressure building as the Modi government plans to start the nationwide discussion in January for evolving a new education policy.

According to an article published in Free Press Journal, RSS has prepared an "alternative" syllabus that in its two-day conclave. The syllabus is focused on Vedic and moral education, Sanskrit, family values and vocational training.

"The Saffron experts who met at the conclave on the "nationalist education" organised by the RSS-backed Punarutthan Vidyapeeth and attended by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat brainstormed on what the organisers described at formation of an alternative syllabus as an integral model of Indian education."

As reported in the article Indumati Katdare, the convener of Vidyapeeth from Nagpur had no hesitation in declaring that "we want to polarise the academia into our ideology because at the end of the day, they will be the ones teaching this Indianised curriculum to the students." Though organised in the name of Vidyapeeth, no such institution exists except for Punarutthan Trust. Katdare is its secretary. One of the activists who attended the conclave claimed over 250 academics, including eight vice-chancellors, had attended the conclave held at the RSS's Reshimbagh facility in Nagpur.

The articles states that the ideas thrown up in the conclave which will be presented to the HRD Ministry include training of teachers in the nationalist ideology, rewriting the chapters on the Muslim invaders since they depict the Hindu leaders as weak having a negative impression on children, teach value-based economy and make students learn from their families on how to acquire a right kind of socio-cultural base.

<http://freepressjournal.in/rss-building-pressure-for-nationalist-education/>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014

(Jeet Singh)

HEALTH

Infant Mortality Rate Record of AP, Telangana Worst in South India

(Prabeerkumar Sikdar, *The Times of India*, December 10, 2014)

This article highlights the dismal situation of newborns in the states of Andhra Pradesh & Telangana. In terms of infant mortality rate (IMR), they depict 41 out of every 1,000 newborns dying before they reach the age of one year. Both are jointly ranked worse than underdeveloped states such as Jharkhand and Uttarakhand. In terms of IMR, undivided AP figured at the bottom of south Indian states comprising Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, according to the just released 'State of India's Newborns-2014', a nationwide survey report on neonatal health indicators.

The undivided AP lagged behind remaining south Indian states even in other five key neonatal parameters as well,

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including neonatal mortality rate (death from birth to 28 days, per 1,000 live births), early neonatal mortality rate (death from birth to seven days), late neonatal mortality rate (death from eighth day to 28 days), post neonatal mortality rate (death from 28 days of birth to 364 days), and under five mortality rate (number of children dying before the age of five/ 1,000 live births in a year).

According to Dr B Balram, vice-president, Telangana Government Doctors' Association, "The damning report points to our failure in implementing centrally-funded schemes like Janani Sishu Suraksha Karyakram in AP and Telangana. The other main problem is lack of convergence among officials, primary health centres, medium-sized government hospitals and teaching hospitals respectively." Meanwhile, there is a severe shortage of paediatricians in all the 44 state-run special newborn facilities in the undivided AP, out of which 18 are in Telangana and the remaining 26 in AP. Low salaries are keeping paediatricians away from taking the jobs. However, these concerns are not being adequately addressed.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Infant-mortality-rate-record-of-AP-Telangana-worst-in-south-India/articleshow/45443039.cms>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

Silent Epidemic: Superbugs Killing India's Newborns

(Priyanka Singh, *Down To Earth*, December 5, 2014)

According to a recent study carried out by international medical science journal Lancet 58,000 infants have died in 2013 as these infants were born with bacterial infections that are resistant to antibiotics.

According to a 2014 World Health Organization (WHO) report, antibiotic resistance is now a major threat to public health and is no longer a prediction for future. The WHO report observes that resistance is occurring across many different infectious agents but the report focuses on antibiotic resistance in respect of seven different bacteria responsible for common, serious diseases such as bloodstream infections (sepsis), diarrhoea, pneumonia, urinary tract infections and gonorrhoea. Newborns are particularly vulnerable because their immune systems are fragile, leaving little time for doctors to find a drug that works.

According to the Lancet report, doctors in Nepal and India are finding it more difficult to treat common infections in neonates and of the urinary tracts which earlier could be treated with antibiotics. "Each time we use antibiotics, we

allow the few superbugs—bacteria that are able to survive the antibiotic—to thrive. Over time, the entire population of bacteria is made up only of these superbugs and our antibiotics no longer work," says Ramanan Laxminarayan, vice-president, research and policy at the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI).

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/silent-epidemic-superbugs-killing-india-s-newborns>

Date Accessed: 6.12.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

India's Healthcare Crisis

(Dipti Jain, *Live mint*, December 8, 2014)

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its recent assessment of Indian Economy identified India's poor health outcomes as one of country's major developmental challenges. In 2012, India witnessed 253 deaths per 100,000 persons due to communicable diseases alone, much higher than the global average of 178. India faces a higher disease burden than other emerging economies such as China, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico and Sri Lanka. Even poorer neighbors such as Nepal and Bangladesh have a better record in health compared to India.

The reasons why the Indian Healthcare is in crisis are:

- The acute unavailability of doctors and nurses and one of the highest diseases burdens in the world.
- Another key reason for poor health of Indians is the high proportion of out-of-pocket expenditure on health because of low insurance coverage and weak public health systems, which forces even poor people to visit private medical practitioners, and drives up average health costs.
- Public health expenditure in India has moved up over the past decade, but still remains among the lowest in the world.
- India's public health expenditure is not just low, it is also regressive. The poorest income classes benefit less from the public health system than the better-off sections of society.

According to a 2010 World Bank estimate, India loses 6% of its gross domestic product (GDP) annually because of premature deaths and preventable illnesses. A key reason behind the poor health of the average Indian is the low level of public investments in preventive health facilities such as sanitation and waste management, as well as in medical care facilities such as primary health centres and health professionals. Even when public health facilities are available, they are often of poor quality. The poorest income classes receive fewer benefits from the public health system.

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The lack of reliable public health services and the absence of health insurance compel the poor to spend heavily on private medical care.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/pHCS4KW8ZnFqIUqRIILVFN/Five-charts-that-explain-Indias-healthcare-crisis.html>

Date Accessed: 8.12.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

High Neonatal Deaths in Bihar Worry Doctors

(Times of India, December 7, 2014)

Bihar accounts for the second highest neonatal death in the country. About 80,000 kids die every year in the state mostly from preventable diseases, especially asphyxia that accounts for the 20% of neonatal death. Neonatal death rate is 29 nationally and at 28 for Bihar (per 1000 live birth).

There is also a growing worry about the rising preterm birth, which increases the probability of neonatal deaths. The probability of infection increases if the birth takes place before 37 weeks as against 39 weeks. Dr Vikram Datta, secretary of the National Neonatal Forum (NNF), noted that most of these deaths are preventable. He further added poor health care is also responsible for such death. Private insurance companies refuse to ensure the poor kids because of high risks. Dr. Datta is urging the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority to make regulations in this regard.

Dr Datta points out that even if the neonates survive, the chances of diseases and infections are still very high. A follow-up facility is required to address such issues. The Rashtriya Swasthya Bal Karyakram (RSBK) has been launched "to address newborn defects, congenital defects, development delays and disorders of inborn metabolism." The pilot has been launched in a few states and Bihar has also been asked to prepare a blue print for the same.

Dr. Jain, President of the NNF, stressed the importance of introducing health education as part of the school curriculum. Importance of hygiene, institutionalized delivery and proper nutrition should be stressed.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/High-neonatal-deaths-in-Bihar-worry-doctors/articleshow/45399335.cms>

Date Accessed: 11.12.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

India 'Too Reliant' on Chinese Drug Imports

(Shilpa Kannan, BBC, December 5, 2014)

India produces a third of the world's medicine (mostly generic) but 80 percent of its raw material is imported from China. The dependence is so much that there are no domestic producers for some essential medicines. These include painkillers such as paracetamol and Aspirin, and antibiotics such as amoxicillin. Moreover, there are no domestic producers for penicillin. This has given China an overhand in the supply and drug price control. Thus, a border dispute with China could cause public health crisis in the country.

The dependence on import of drugs has been increasing in the recent times. "In 2012 it is estimated that Indian drug imports totalled \$4.6bn (£2.9bn), a rise of about 58% compared to \$2.9bn in 2011." Indian manufacturers blame government policies for such a situation. Low imports costs have increased dependence on China. Some point out that bureaucracy and difficult environment clearances create hindrances and disincentives production in India.

India has been trying to get China to shift production to India. For this, Special Economic Zones have been created to incentivize investment. With Chinese investment, India is also asking for presence in pharmaceutical industry in China, which can also compensate for the widening trade deficit between the neighbours.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-30330898>

Date Accessed: 11.12.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

LAW AND JUSTICE

Government to Decriminalize Suicide Bids

(Times of India, December 10, 2014)

The government has decided to decriminalize suicide bids by removing Section 309 from the Indian Penal Code (IPC). According to Section 309 of the IPC, "whoever attempts to commit suicide and does any act towards commission of such offence, shall be punished for a term which may extend to one year of with fine, or with both".

The decision comes after 18 States and 4 Union Territories supported the recommendations made by the Law Commission of India in its 210th Report to remove Section 309 of the IPC, as Law and Order is a State subject. However, five states including Delhi, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Sikkim have expressed concerns towards the move to decriminalize suicide bids.

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The 210th Report of the Law Commission noted that suicide attempts should be considered as “manifestation of a diseased condition of mind, deserving treatment and care rather than punishment.”

The law panel recommended the government to repeal the anachronistic law keeping in views expressed by the WHO and the International Association for Suicide Prevention, France and the Indian Psychiatric Society.

Almost all countries in Europe and North America have decriminalized attempted suicide.

Only a few countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Singapore criminalize suicide bids.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Government-decriminalizes-attempt-to-commit-suicide-removes-section-309/articleshow/45452253.cms>

Date Accessed: 10.12.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

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COMMUNALISM**Yale Study: BJP Gains in Polls after Every Riot**(DP Bhattacharya, *The Economic Times*, December 5, 2014)

In a paper titled "Do parties matter for ethnic violence? Evidence from India", three political scientists from the Yale University, claim that if Congress had lost all close elections between 1962 and 2000, there could have been 10% more communal riots in the country. They have also established that "the election of a single Congress MLA in a district brought about a 32% reduction in the probability of a riot breaking out prior to the next election.

Analysing the effect of riots on the vote share of "Hindu nationalist parties", the paper mentions that "the BJS/BJP saw a 0.8 percentage point increase in their vote share following a riot in the year prior to an election". "The polarization of the electorate induced by riots disadvantages Congress in subsequent elections, making it counter-productive for the party's affiliates to instigate riots following an electoral loss," the paper observes. It has further found that while Hindu-Muslim riots are electorally expensive for Congress, the riots in fact strengthen the "ethno-religious parties at the expense of multi-ethnic ones like the Congress".

The study further adds, "The paramount importance of Congress's role is underscored by the fact that our estimates likely place a lower bound on its true impact. Taken in conjunction with the main result, our secondary finding that riots reduce subsequent Congress vote shares raises the possibility of a feedback loop or multiplier effect, whereby the outbreak of Hindu-Muslim violence causes Congress to lose votes and seats, which in turn leads to more riots, and so on in a vicious cycle."

http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/45378840.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Date Accessed: 09.12.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

ELDERLY**UNFPA Report on Status of Elderly in India**(Aswaq Masoodi, *Livemint*, December 5, 2014)

According to a report released on December 2, 2014 by UN Population Fund (UNFPA) at a two-day conference on ageing in India, one in 10 elderly people are subjected to verbal, physical or emotional abuse after turning 60. For elderly women, the main perpetrators are family members. The report adds that higher levels of abuse are reported by the elderly living in rural areas compared with those in urban areas. The primary survey was carried out in Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal since these states have a higher percentage of population in the age group 60 years and above compared with the national average.

The report states, "About six per cent report that some form of abuse took place in the month prior to the survey, with verbal abuse being the primary form of violence. The main perpetrators of abuse were from outside the family for elderly men and within the family for elderly women." The study shows that a majority (71%) of the elderly work because of economic necessity. This is particularly true among women. There is also a perceived feminization in ageing as the proportion of older widowed women has increased more rapidly compared with men. However, with this higher life expectancy in women comes a higher vulnerability to poorer health. This poses a critical risk as many elderly women face greater isolation. There is also a gender component related to hospitalization in urban areas, with more elder men (10%) being hospitalized than women (8%). The elderly constitute 8.6% of the total population, which is 103 million people, according to the 2011 census. The population is estimated to rise to 173.18 million in 2026. Even with this distribution, pension or retirement benefits are not available to a large majority. Due to the informal nature of the work the elderly are involved in, less than 10% get employer's pension (3% women and 15% men). The report states more than 70% of the elderly are aware of the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) and the Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS). The utilization of IGNOAPS and the Annapurna scheme, which provides foodgrain to people below poverty line and above 65 years of age, is abysmally low among the target group of those belonging to below poverty line (BPL) households. Only around 18% of the elderly belonging to BPL households are beneficiaries of IGNOAPS, while only 3.5% utilize the Annapurna scheme and a quarter of elderly widowed women utilize the IGNWPS.

According to Sumati Kulkarni, retired professor, International Institute for Population Sciences, "an effective strategy is needed to improve the coverage of pension schemes, reduce leakage of benefits, simplifying application procedure and create efficient delivery mechanism." With 65% of the population under 40, India will progress to an

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ageing population with major problems, especially of healthcare utilization.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/hHOhFGstAq80hV2vLnOfTK/One-in-10-elderly-people-subjected-to-abuse.html>

Date Accessed: 09.12.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

INDIA AND WORLD

INDIA IN THE WORLD
Normal Trade with Pak Depends on India Getting MFN Status: Government
(The Statesman, December 5, 2014)

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government has said in the Lok Sabha that progress in normalisation of bilateral trade with Pakistan would depend on its decision to grant most favoured nations(MFN) status to India.

India granted MFN status to Pakistan in 1996 but Pakistan has not given MFN status to India. Minister of state for Commerce and Industry informed the lok sabha that if MFN status is granted to India by Pakistan, it would facilitate direct bilateral trade and lead to “economic gains for both countries.” The minister, however, said that there are no specific talks being held on trade facilitation between the two countries.

During the meeting between Prime ministers of India and Pakistan in May 2014, it was stated that the 2 sides “ could move immediately towards full trade normalisation on the basis of the September 2012 roadmap worked out between the commerce secretaries of both countries. In January 2014, during the meeting of the commerce ministries of both sides they reaffirmed the commitment of the two governments to expeditiously establish normal trading relations and also provide Non-discriminatory Market Access (NDMA) to India.

Political analysts have noted with concern that at the moment nothing specific happening between India and Pakistan in the sphere of trade negotiations. Therefore the roadmap and timelines leading to establishment of normal trading relations between the two countries, seems to have become the victim of ongoing tension between the two.

<http://www.thestatesman.net/news/91786-normal-trade-with-pak-depends-on-india-getting-mfn-status-govt.html>

Date Accessed:7.12.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

EAST AND SOUTH EAST ASIA
Agricultural Imports from South East Asia Cause for Concern

(Business Standard, December 11, 2014)

The imports of pepper from south East Asian countries are a cause of concern since they are expected to impact small farmers of Southern states. CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) countries are also members of Asean (Association of South East Asian Nations) group. India has implemented a free trade agreement with the 10-nations ASEAN bloc. Pepper imports in India have though decreased from 16,100 tonnes in 2010-11 to 15,680 tonnes in 2013-14, but still farmers associations have raised their concerns

Addressing the members and business delegates of CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) countries, Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said "There are voices of anxiety that if there are other than legitimate trade coming in, may be some where some kind of a rules/country of origin of rules being bypassed. Products coming through different countries." She further said, Kerala has expressed a lot of concerns about pepper which comes into this country from Vietnam "which they are willing to accept but if there are pepper coming from countries which do not grow pepper at all, they (Kerala producers) are worried as to where this pepper comes from".

"And these are issues which can rankle and therefore in engaging with particularly CLMV, I would certainly want greater trust and confidence in talking about not just manufactured goods but also about agri products in which some states in India always have the lead advantage," she added.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/markets/agri-imports-from-south-east-asia-cause-for-concern-114121101453_1.html

Date Accessed: 12.12.2014

(Shruti Issar)

SOUTH ASIA
India to Export Warship to Mauritius

(Deccan Herald, December 10, 2014)

India will export its first indigenously built warship-Barracuda, early next month to Mauritius, which plays a vital role in India's strategic matrix in the Indian Ocean region. The 350 crore war-ship was constructed by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata.

Mauritius is likely to use it for its coast guard facilities. Moreover, the ship can also be put to many other uses. These include “anti-piracy operations, anti-poaching

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operations, search and rescue, helicopter operations (without hangar) and oil spill removal among others.”

A GRSE official mentioned that the ship reached the maximum speed of 22.5 knots even though the contractual obligated only 20 knots. Given the success of the war-ship, Mauritius is likely to follow up with new contracts for two fast-attack craft and 10 fast-interceptor craft.

Other Indian company that exports small sea vessels is Goa Shipyard. The company supplies vessels to Sri Lanka. However, both GRSE and Goa shipyard have poor track record in export.

India is one of the world’s largest arms importers. “In the last three fiscal, India’s export was Rs 512.48 crore in 2011-12; Rs 446.75 crore in 2012-13 and Rs 686.27 crore in 2013-14.”

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/446901/india-export-warship-mauritius.html>

Date Accessed: 11.12.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

OPINION/BOOKS

*OPINIONS***LEARNING NOTHING FROM BHOPAL****(Economic and Political Weekly, December 6, 2014)**

While remembering the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster, it is important to not only talk about the horror but also evaluate whether India has tightened up on the policies regarding hazardous industries.

Between 2003 and 2013 there have been 130 accidents that have caused 563 serious injuries and claimed the lives of 259 people. Moreover, small instances are not recorded. This includes incidents “such as the recent dumping of hazardous effluents into a river in Ulhasnagar on the outskirts of Mumbai that led to several hundred people being hospitalised when the chemicals reacted with the water.” Is there any monitoring mechanism to check the release of hazardous chemicals?

Post Bhopal a number of legislations were introduced. This includes the Environment Protection Act 1986 that provided rules for governing of hazardous waste. Even the Factories Act was amended to scope of risk to from factory workers to general public. A buffer zone was to be maintained between factories operating with hazardous material and residential zones. However, such goals have not been realized. In fact, Koodankulam nuclear plant shares a wall with a colony of people resettled after the 2004 tsunami.

The recently released report by the TSR Subramaniam committee also recognizes that problems lie not in the legislation but in the ‘operative instructions.’ “Those responsible for clearing hazardous projects depend on information provided by project proponents.” There is no independent system to assess pollution or its probable impact.

There has been no environmental justice in the country, with only the Supreme Court acting as an environmental court. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) assigned to look into tasks of preventing mining in ‘no-go’ areas, is now being devoid of its power. The committee recommended that the NGT power be diluted and a new board and law be established to look into environment protection in the country.

Its important to realize that environment protection is not a hurdle to development but an essential step to safeguarding the lives of workers and communities in the country.

<http://www.epw.in/editorials/learning-nothing-bhopal.html>

Date Accessed: 11.12.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

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