

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

Over the last few years there has been a lot of good news on the status of children in the country – be it infant mortality, health or education. Our Cover Story in this issue however digs deep to find that tribal children have been left behind on virtually all these parameters and as a group have the highest incidence of child mortality, malnutrition, and the poorest scores on Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) at the secondary level of education across the country. A combination of low acceptance of, and access to, modern health care, appropriate nutrition, poverty and education has resulted in a disproportionately higher percentage of tribal children being involved in labour, prostitution, and most alarmingly, even the Maoist struggle! While there have been a number of government policies that have helped improve the status of tribal children, the underlying reasons for the limited impact of these policies seems to be the inability to take cognizance of local culture and habits while designing and implementing these policies. For example the ICDS program does not take into consideration tribal food habits and results in poor nutrition intake by them; similarly a higher number of school age tribal children drop-out at the secondary school level due to alien content, curriculum and poor pedagogy. Policy gaps combined with development related migration and displacement of tribes have led to tribal children being one of the most vulnerable sections of our society – a gap that must be addressed by specific policy measures at the earliest.

BJP ruled states seem to be continuing with a trend to constrain the rights of labour as the Gujarat government follows Rajasthan in amending the state Labour Laws. The amended law, among other things reduces (from three to one year) the time that workmen would get to make an application against their dismissal. Considering the financial and procedural complexity a poor workman would face in lodging a complaint with a tribunal or a court, this move effectively denies him any recourse in the case of wrongful dismissal and encourages a strong “hire-and-fire” trend within industry – a move that would have a serious impact on our workers.

And finally, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is proving to be a victory of “metrics over benefit” – while the government has announced that 99.74% households have been covered under the scheme, the true benefit of the scheme seems to be a long way off. Apparently in case of premature death, insurance will be paid only if the account-holder has a RuPay debit card and carried out a minimum of one successful financial or non-financial transaction 45 days prior to the death. Considering only 80% account holders have been issued RuPay cards and about 70% are zero balance accounts, a number of account holders may not meet both the criterion and therefore their families will not receive the insurance amount due to them. A sleight of hand to help the insurer rather than the “insured”?

We do hope that you enjoy reading this issue of RGICS Policy Watch and look forward to your comments and feedback.

*Barkha Deva
Associate Director*

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COVER STORY

Tribal Children: An Insecure and Uncertain Childhood

Introduction:

Scheduled Tribe's (ST) are one of the most disadvantaged social groups of India and comprise around 8.6% of the total population. Numerous affirmative action policies including financial support has not really changed the socio-economic condition of these Tribes. There are a number of reasons behind the persistent deprivation of this large section of Indian society that have been discussed time and again by stakeholders, researchers and policy makers. Amid such discussions on tribal policies and their outcomes seen in empowerment of these tribes, normally issues of their children get no significant attention. Verginious Xaxa of Institute of Human Development (2011) in his report admits that there is paucity of literature on Indian tribal children. This sub group has not found significant place in academics and in many other institutional data collection initiatives. However, the available literature and data especially on health and education, reveals the almost sub-human conditions of tribal children. As we know irrespective of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, children are a highly vulnerable group. They need love, care,, protection, adequate nutrition and an enabling environment -that must be provided by their families, neighborhoods, schools and the state. For tribes, ensuring even the most basic amenities for their children for a healthy childhood is a difficult task in India, as tribes as a community are facing all kinds of discrimination, domination and deprivation.

Age Group wise Child Population of India (Figures in Crore)						
Age group	Person		Male		Female	
	ST	All	ST	All	ST	All
0-4	1.15	11.2	0.58	5.86	0.56	5.41
5-9	1.27	12.69	0.65	6.63	0.62	6.06
10-14	1.27	13.27	0.65	6.94	0.62	6.32
15-19	1.05	12.05	0.53	6.39	0.51	5.65

Source: Census 2011

The tribal population of the country, as per the 2011 census, is 10.43 crore. 89.97% of them live in rural areas and 10.03% in urban areas. The ministry of tribal affairs has listed hundreds of tribal groups depending upon their distinct cultural, social and geographical backgrounds. Broadly, the tribes inhabit two distinct geographical areas – the Central Indian and the North- Eastern Area. More than half of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in Central India, i.e., Madhya Pradesh (14.69%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), Jharkhand (8.29%), Andhra Pradesh (5.7%), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Gujarat (8.55%) and Rajasthan (8.86%). The other distinct area lies in the North Eastern part of the country (MoTA, 2013). Tribal children across various age groups represent approximately 10% of the total population of children in India. This large section of the population is prone to serious deprivation and exploitation because of their distinct socio-economic and cultural background. Various studies have revealed a number of problems faced by tribal children including malnutrition, starvation, high mortality, morbidity, child labour, low education and discrimination. As expected, such a wide gamut of problems results in a highly vulnerable section of society.

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Survival:

Children in the age group 0-6 years are a vulnerable section of the tribal society as survival itself is an issue for them. Effective health systems, nutrition, along with other factors have a great role in ensuring their survival. Unfortunately, tribal children are the most unaddressed group as far as public health institutions are concerned.

. The latest data collected under the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-III) in 2005-06 suggests that around 68.5% tribal women were found to be anemic, and have a high prevalence of nutritional and chronic energy deficiency. When it comes to pregnancy, they have the lowest access levels to health institutions and unskilled persons or traditional health practitioners manage approximately 75% of all deliveries. . A larger incidence of physical weakness and poor postnatal care by unskilled workers leads to higher maternal and infant mortality rates in the tribal population as compared to the national average. Taken together these metrics underline the fact that tribal children are in fact at higher risk from the very moment that they are conceived.

S3.3: Delivery care <i>(Figures in percentages)</i>									
Social Groups	Place of delivery (Health Institution/ Facility)				Person providing assistance during delivery				
	Public sector	Private sector	Own home	Delivered through health facility	Doctor	Mid-wife/ ANM/ Nurse/ LHV	Relatives/ Friends	Dai/ TBA	Delivered by a skilled provider
ST	11.6	5.8	70.9	17.7	17.1	7.0	23.0	50.2	25.4
SC	19.4	13.4	56.8	32.9	29.4	10.4	20.7	37.7	40.6
OBC	16.1	21.1	51.8	37.7	33.8	11.7	15.5	37.1	46.7
Others	21.8	28.7	40.5	51.0	47.4	9.3	11.3	30.4	57.8
Total	18.0	20.2	51.3	38.7	35.2	10.3	16.2	36.5	46.6

Source: NFHS-3, 2005-06, M/o H&FW, GOI

The metrics available for the 7-18 age-groups also reflect a similarly dismal trend.. The NFHS-III data suggests that most of them are under-nourished and have minimal access to the official health system. A 2014 Unicef report revealed that every second tribal child is stunted and a bulk of them in fact are severely stunted. According to the study, “the proportion of stunted tribal children increased with increasing age. One quarter of tribal children aged 0-5 months were stunted. Stunting and severe stunting doubled in the 6-11 months period and by 18 months, 75% tribal children were already stunted.” The data reveals the scarcity of nutrition in tribal region. Children do not receive appropriate amounts of energy and nutrition as they grow older and as a result, almost 77% tribal children were found to be anemic.

The severity of poor health conditions of newborn tribal children needs to be addressed via nutrition programs such as the ICDS. The NFHS data however shows that around half of tribal children are receiving the desired nutrition via the ICDS scheme but another half is still out of the system. In many cases, it was also found that the supplementary nutrition provided under the scheme did not take into consideration the local/tribal culture and food habits – resulting in a situation that the children found it inedible and the ICDS supplementary nutrition program was completely wasted as the tribal children find the ICDS.

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S3.1: Key health indicators as per NFHS-3 (2005-06)			
	SC	ST	Total
Infant Mortality	66.4	62.1	57.0
Neo-natal Mortality	46.3	39.9	39.0
Pre- natal Mortality	55.0	40.6	48.5
Child Mortality	23.2	35.8	18.4
Under five Mortality	88.1	95.7	74.3
ANC Checkup	74.2	70.5	77.1
Percentage Institutional Deliveries	32.9	17.7	38.7
Childhood vaccination (full immunization)	39.7	31.3	43.5

Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2005-06

The mortality rate of tribal children is high compared to the average national mortality rate. Similarly, these children lag behind in many other health indicators as compared to non-tribal children in their age group. A survey carried out by the Kerala government in tribal regions of the state revealed that high level of malnutrition and mortality among tribal children has a direct correlation with lack of nutritious food and proper health care for tribal women during pregnancy (Shaji, 2014). To provide better health and nutrition to children and women the Government of India has been promoting institutional care in tribal regions for the last few decades but the recent Rural Health Statistics released by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare reveal a huge shortfall in health institutions and all kinds of health professionals in the tribal areas. The life of tribal children is deprived of all basic needs that are required for survival and growth of a human being. This early deprivation leads to a number of other disadvantages such as poor education, unemployment and poverty in the life of tribal people.

Education:

Education data reveals a bleak picture as far as tribal children are concerned. A report by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), 2013 said, "Though India's education system over the past few decades has made significant progress, the literacy of the Scheduled Tribes and other marginalized groups has been a matter of concern even after so many years of independence. This is despite the fact that the largest proportion of centrally sponsored programmes for tribal development is related to the single sector of education." In the last few years the enrollment of tribal children has progressively increased. In fact, in primary and upper primary schools the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of tribal children is higher than the national average. However, the following table reveals that the GER for tribal children decreases as the level of schooling increases. In the age group of 6-13 years most of tribal children are found enrolled in schools but by the time they reach the 14-17 age group, a large chunk of tribal children are seen to have dropped out of the schooling system.

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Classes	ST	All Categories
Classes I - V (6 - 10 Years)	137	116
Classes VI - VIII (11 - 13 Years)	88.9	85.5
Classes I - VIII (6 - 13 Years)	119.7	104.3
Classes IX - X (14 - 15 Years)	53.3	65
Classes I - X (6 - 15 Years)	106.8	96.2
Classes XI - XII (16 - 17 Years)	28.8	39.3
Classes IX - XII (14 - 17 Years)	41.5	52.1
Classes I - XII (6 - 17 Years)	94.8	86.5

Source: Statistics Of School Education 2010-2011

Xaxa (2010) argues that access to education cannot be solely assessed based on GER. The important figures are those for attendance and drop-outs. The enrolment of tribal children in school is not that low, but drop-out figures are still very high.

Class	Boys		Girls		Total		
	ST	All	ST	All	ST	All	Gap
Classes I - V	37.2	28.7	33.9	25.1	35.6	27	8.6
Classes I - VIII	54.7	40.3	55.4	41	55	40.6	14.4
Classes I - X	70.6	50.4	71.3	47.9	70.9	49.3	21.6

Source: Statistics Of School Education 2010-2011

Despite a decline in drop-out rate of tribal children in the last few years the current rate of drop-outs is still very high. The gap between the drop out-rate for tribal children and the national average is 8.6 in primary schools, 14.4 in upper primary schools and 21.6 in secondary schools. Xaxa (2010) in his report argues that the low attendance and high drop-out rate can be attributed to alien content and teaching practices along with poor curriculum and syllabus, deficient pedagogy and negligent teachers. Education is a serious concern for the tribal population. The GER data shows that the tribal education is largely limited to primary and upper primary schooling. A large section of the tribal population is illiterate and among the literate tribal population, most of them are educated only up to primary and upper-primary classes.

Ramification of Early Childhood Deprivation:

The indigenous tribal culture, which is ecologically sustainable and pro nature, has become a burden for millions of tribal people as modern and industrial life style has been recognized as mainstream culture. The wide differences between these two cultures have alienated the tribal population resulting in deprivation, discrimination and marginalization. Children are the worst affected from this alienation leading to a situation where millions of them are denied their fundamental rights and exploited in the most inhumane manner, some of which are briefly highlighted below:

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A. Child Labour:

According to HAQ (A leading Child Rights organization), child labour is highest among Scheduled Tribes, Muslims, Schedule Castes and OBC children. As a large section of tribal children drop out of school by the time they turn 14 they're propensity to join the labour force is far higher than the rest of the population. According to a working paper of ILO Larsen (2003) "some indigenous, tribal or ethnic minority children are more likely to end up in certain types of child labour than their peers. In South Asia, indigenous peoples predominate among certain forms of debt-bondage." Beedi Industry and domestic work are among common occupations adopted by the tribes in different parts of country. The Census 2001 data has shown that both of these industries together accommodate around 36% of Indian child labourers. The poor economic conditions of tribes in India and poor implementation of labour laws create enabling environments for the exploitation of these children.

B. Trafficking & prostitution:

Young girls from the weaker sections of society, especially from tribal regions have been easy targets for human traffickers. Young tribal girls used to be illegally trafficked from rural areas to metro cities for various purposes such as domestic help, child labour and prostitution. Larsen (2003) argues, in India, abduction, trafficking of Adivasi girls are closely linked to brothels and a number of other instances of sexual exploitation.

C. Young Maoist Soldiers:

It has been observed that the Maoist rebels in central Indian states are recruiting child soldiers. The rebels are forcing poor families to hand over their children, aged mostly between 10-15 years, with promises of food and a better life in camps (Majumdar, 2008). Answering a parliamentary question in August 2014, Ministry of Home Affairs confirmed that the Maoists are recruiting minors, both boys and girls, from tribal belts in the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Odisha. Maoists have created separate wings of child soldiers namely 'Bal Dasta' and 'Bal Sangham' and train them on weapon handling and on the use of different types of improvised explosive devices.

Maoists have used the deprivation and marginalization of these poor tribal kids to make them revolt against the state and the establishment, and according to the Ministry of Home Affairs, children once recruited by the Maoists are not permitted to leave.

Conclusion:

National, international, and civil society reports indicate that the status of children as a whole has improved over a period of time in India. However, data also shows that India has the largest share of world's child-related problems such as child marriage, child labour, illiteracy, malnutrition etc. A deeper analysis of these figures reveals wide disparities in the status of children in different socio-economic and cultural groups. Tribal children are the most significantly marginalized group. The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of tribal children in the age group 14-17 years is 41.5 as compared to national average of 52.1. Similarly, the dropout rate of ST children in class I-X is 70.6 as compared to national average of 50.4. According to the NFHS-III report, the mortality rate for children in the 0-5 age group is 96 for ST's as compared to the national average of 74. As per a recent Unicef report Only 10% tribal children aged 6-23 months were fed the minimum recommended types of complementary foods (a proxy of recommended minimum diet diversity). This figure is nearly three times lower in tribal children than in non-tribal children (28%). A number of reports and studies also show that the tribal children are the worst affected by human trafficking, which leads to major problems like child labour, bondage, prostitution and other exploitative activities.

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Many experts argue that the persisting deprivation of tribes is not merely a result of failure of tribal welfare policies. The success of many development projects has also affected tribes adversely. Many purely growth oriented policies and projects in this country created greater harm to this vulnerable section of society. Large-scale migration and displacement of tribes due to development projects such as railways, roads, power, mines and industries have undermined the sustainable tribal life style. It is this combination of policy gaps and displacement that needs to be addressed so that tribal children are not left behind in the future.”

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HEADLINES

Centre Takes Steps to Convert PDS to Cash Transfers

(Nitin Sethi & Surabhi Agarwal, *Business Standard*, February 24, 2015)

The current union government (NDA) has taken a step to implement Shanta Kumar Committee Report, which recommended that the government should progressively move away from distributing food and towards cash transfers. It had also recommended that the subsidy for food should be restricted to a maximum of 40% of the population instead of the existing minimum 67% limit under the National Food Security Act.

The NDA government has decided to convert the subsidised food supply into cash transfers under the Direct Benefits Transfer Scheme. The food ministry has issued letters to the union territories stating the shift required from physical supply of subsidised foodgrain to cash transfers. It is also readying plans to pilot this shift in some states, focusing first on urban areas.

Business Standard reviewed letters written by the Union food ministry to the state and Union Territory governments on the issue. The letter sent on February 10 reads, "Government is looking forward to implement DBT for food grains initially in Union Territories and few districts of the states on pilot basis."

The NDA government has offered the states and the Union Territories following three ways to convert the subsidised food supply to cash transfers.

1. By transferring cash to the bank accounts of beneficiaries every month and they are left to purchase the foodgrain from the market.
2. The ration shops would be provided grains at near market prices or at minimum support price. The people will be then asked to buy this grain at the market rates and the difference between the central issue price (the rate at which the Centre releases subsidised grain to the state for PDS) and the market price would be deposited in the beneficiaries' accounts.
3. The governments would continue to provide the subsidised grain but the authentication of beneficiaries would be done through Aadhaar and an electronic database.

The NDA government has asked the states to completely digitise their data of beneficiaries - referred to as priority households or BPL households - and then link the Aadhaar numbers of the beneficiaries with these cards. In the letter

issued by the ministry, the ministry has said, "The complete digitisation of beneficiary data and Aadhaar seeding is a precondition."

The Union Territories in February were asked to identify one of the three options laid down by the union government that they would like to go for. Further were asked to have a comprehensive plan ready to implement the conversion of food grains supply to cash transfers by the end of the month. All the states have been asked to provide monthly reports to the Centre on how they are implementing these changes.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/centre-takes-steps-to-convert-pds-to-cash-transfers-115022400033_1.html

Date Accessed: 25.2.2015

(Shruti Issar)

RSS Affiliate Says That Amendments to Land Acquisition Act are Anti-Poor

(*Press Reader*, February 24, 2015)

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates opposed the amendments to 'The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013.' K.N. Govindacharya, the founder of Rashtriya Swabhimani Aandolan founder and a former RSS ideologue said that "the government is pushing ahead with amendments that are anti-poor, anti-people and anti-farmers."

Mr. Govindacharya said that organisations like the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch would oppose the amendments proposed by the government and push for their rollback as they were not convinced after discussions on the issue with the BJP leadership.

The RSS and its affiliated organisations are seeking the rollback of clauses that remove gram sabha's rights to give consent and allow for acquisition of farmland. Mr. Govindacharya said that the government is pushing for amendments even though India has lost about 1.8 lakh hectares of farmland over the years and that the farmers were not even getting the minimum support price from the government. In Marathwada 93 farmers have committed suicide in the past 45 days, said Mr. Govindacharya.

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Mr. Govindacharya opposed the government's role in facilitating acquisition of land for the industry and said that it should be limited to being an adjudicator between the industry and the farmers.

<http://www.pressreader.com/india/the-hindu/20150224/281938836362997/TextView>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015

(Afreen Faridi)

ECONOMY

Macro Economic Dimension of India

Table 1: General Inflation Rates in Indian States: January 2015 (%)

States	Rural	Urban	General
All India	4.71	5.32	5.00
Northern Region			
Jammu & Kashmir	4.55	4.72	4.63
Himachal Pradesh	4.66	4.07	4.53
Punjab	5.87	5.01	5.48
Chandigarh	4.18	6.04	5.97
Uttarakhand	3.58	3.48	3.50
Haryana	5.99	5.05	5.66
Delhi	2.31	3.31	3.31
Uttar Pradesh	4.13	4.49	4.24
Western Region			
Rajasthan	6.16	4.49	4.29
Gujarat	4.81	4.44	4.61
Maharashtra	5.53	5.82	5.74
Goa	7.15	4.63	5.87
Lakshadweep	8.87	4.39	6.43
Daman & Die	5.72	7.70	6.42
Dadra Nagar & Haveli	2.68	2.73	2.65
Central Region			
Madhya Pradesh	4.91	5.00	4.94
Chattishgarh	3.85	6.24	4.64
Southern Region			
Andhra Pradesh	3.68	5.48	4.42
Karnakata	5.45	7.44	6.52
Kerala	6.96	8.40	7.50
Tamil Nadu	5.62	7.29	6.52
Puducherry	4.97	6.38	6.01
Andaman & Nicobar Island	9.33	2.12	5.63
Northeastern Region			
Arunachal Pradesh	8.33	-	-
Assam	2.70	6.06	3.36
Manipur	1.82	3.81	2.57
Meghalaya	11.70	8.91	4.05
Mizoram	4.48	3.66	4.05
Nagaland	10.88	6.61	9.17
Tripura	9.14	6.46	8.36
Sikkim	2.93	7.35	3.88
Eastern Region			
Bihar	4.75	3.23	4.50
Jharkhand	1.17	2.94	1.76
West Bengal	2.86	3.94	3.30
Odisha	5.11	5.49	4.64

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.

Table 2: Inflation Analyses for Last Six Months: All India

Months	Rural	Urban	Combined
August 2014	8.45	7.34	7.96
September 2014	8.35	7.04	7.80
October 2014	6.68	6.34	6.46
November 2014	5.60	5.55	5.60
December 2014	4.02	4.69	4.30
January 2015	4.71	5.32	5.00

The above table 2 shows that All India Inflation rates for rural, urban and combined sectors have seen continuous decline over the months from August 2014 to December 2014. While in January 2015, the rates have increased marginally across its rural, urban and combined sectors.

ECONOMY

RBI Governor Disapproves Inheritance Tax Idea

(*Millenniumpost*, February 23, 2015)

Strongly disapproving the idea of inheritance tax, Reserve Bank Governor has advocated a “cultural change” which pulls the rich towards philanthropy or giving back to the society. Specifically speaking on inheritance tax idea, the governor said that rather than bringing people down, the focus should be on taking people up. He further stated that inheritance tax only helps the lawyers in the society.

His views come amidst some voices seeking an inheritance tax in the forthcoming Budget, which would mean people may have to pay for inheriting a priced property. According to the votaries, this ensures the society ceases being aristocratic. Pointing to the larger play of philanthropies in the Western corporate world, the RBI Governor said that the Western world has a better way of dealing with the issue, which is to “shame” the rich into devoting wealth for good causes.

The central banker also said the system must “incentivise” the people to create wealth, which in turn has a spillover effect in form of job creation, and stressed that the country needs to respect that for some people leaving some wealth for the kids would be a priority.

<http://www.millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=96163>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

Freight Hike to Add to Inflation Troubles

(*Business Today*, February 27, 2015)

In order to boost their revenue stream, the Indian Railways will raise railway freight rates on coal, iron ore and steel from April 1 to help expand of their network.. In this way, the railways plan to increase their annual freight carrying capacity to 1.5 billion tonnes from 1 billion tonnes, in part with the funds from the higher rates. However, the Railways Minister did not speak of any timeline by which this expansion would be complete. This move to hike freight fares could potentially raise costs for local steel makers at a time when demand is weak and imports are surging.

Freight has been cross subsidising passenger fares for a long time through successive governments. The rates for coal transport will rise by 6.3%, while those for iron ore and steel will increase 0.8%. Charges for the transport of urea and grains will also go up 10 by 10%. India aims to raise its investment over the next five years by as much as Rs

850,000 crore to fix its crumbling railway infrastructure.

Steel companies complain that the new rates will increase their costs and squeeze already narrow margins. More importantly, this move can add to the inflation in the country.

<http://businesstoday.intoday.in/story/railway-budget-2015-freight-hike-to-add-to-inflation-woes/1/216222.html>

Date accessed: 26/2/2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE**Gujarat can Ban Strikes for up to 3 Years***(The Times of India, February 26, 2015)*

The Gujarat state assembly witnessed more than its share of upheaval when it passed the Labour Laws (Gujrat Amendment) Bill, 2015. It has also sought to change the definitions in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and clauses in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, which would allow greater control of the government over the industries.

A few key changes that the bill initiates:

- payment of wages by cheque in establishments that employed over 20 labourers, to give effect to the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana; which will then result in 1.2 crore labourers in Gujarat getting their wages by cheque, with the amount then being transferred into their bank accounts created under Jan Dhan Yojana
- **the bill has also introduced for the first time a compounding amount to be paid, for labourers and employers, to settle various offences out of court by involving concerned government authority**
- a proposal to give powers to the government to prohibit strikes in public utility services in the first instance, by increasing the period of prohibition from the existing six months, to one year, and subsequently by any period
- the bill has also scaled down the period of a workman could fight his case against the industry from three to one year
- the extent to which this law denies labour rights can be gauged by the fact that **now a workman would only get a year to make an application against his dismissal, discharge, etc raising as industrial dispute to the labour court or tribunal which was so far three years**
- in cases of an accident the government will become the pleader, in case the pleader has not moved the Labour Commission within 90 days, and mediate an out-of-court settlement with maximum compensation of Rs 21,000, of which 25 percent will go the government
- The new law would also allow employers to change the nature of job of the employees without prior notice. It has also changed the definition of “contractor” to include “outsourcing agencies”, which in some cases, is the government itself.

The labour minister of the state Shaktisinh Gohil has said that amendments have been undertaken with a view to strengthen both labourers and employers. The opposition

has criticized the bill saying that clauses like out-of-court settlement would allow owners to break all laws and get away by paying insubstantial fines. **Till now breaking these laws invited criminal action, which has now been made compoundable, which means settlements of the violation by paying money. The Industrial Disputes Act has also been amended to fix a compounding amount of Rs 21,000 for industrialists and Rs 150 and Rs 3,000 for workers and labourers.** to the tune of Rs 21,000 and for labourers it is between Rs 150 and Rs 3,000. The new amendments have also given a list of employer offences which will be covered under the new law. This would include not depositing bonus or minimum wages, among others. For workers going on strike without informing Labour Commissioner, the compounding amount begins at Rs 150 per day, not exceeding Rs 3,000.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Gujarat-can-ban-strikes-for-up-to-3-years/articleshow/46375301.cms>

Date Accessed: 25.02.2015

(Rohit Chauhan)

One Hundred Days of Letdown*(Anurag Tripathi, Tehelka, February 21, 2015)*

The Bhartiya Janta Party government in Haryana led by Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has finished 100 days in office. The BJP had promised to implement policies on law enforcement and corruption in its run up to the elections. However, most of those promises have been neglected in the government’s initial phase in power. The Chief Minister was unable to handle the crisis which was followed by the arrest of self-styled godman Rampal. The State Police failed to arrest him while he was hiding in Hisar Ashram for a fortnight. In the process of his arrest six people died and several others were severely injured, which also included a reporter. The loss of life could have been avoided had the government acted on time. The State Government has also sought the inclusion of Bhagwat Gita in school curriculum, which disappointed those who were expecting a progressive government. The government has also initiated its unpopular rollback of employee’s retirement age from 60 to 58 year. The new State government disbanded various boards formed by the previous government’s which attracted criticism from within and outside the BJP. **“Election promises like special buses for girls with guards, free treatment to the poor among others remain “untouched” in the past three months of the first BJP government in the State.”**

<http://www.tehelka.com/one-hundred-days-of-letdown/?singlepage=1>

Date Accessed: 26.02.2015

(Rohit Chauhan)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana of Little Help to People

(Kundan Pandey, *Down to Earth*, February 19, 2015)

This article highlights the issue that Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is proving of little benefit to people. It turns out that the benefit of insurance will be available only to those who have the RuPay debit card (issued under PMJDY) and have carried out minimum one successful financial or non-financial transaction 45 days prior to premature death. These little facts were not brought out in the Prime Minister's speech and people have been misled. An RTI reply highlights that a total of 108,464,393 accounts were opened while 89,633,976 RuPay debit cards were issued. A total of 78,834,602 accounts have zero balance. Around 80 million out of the over 100 million accounts opened under the scheme have zero balance.

Any person who has zero balance in the account would logically not go to the bank for a transaction. At the same time, if he does not make a transaction, he will not get the promised insurance in case of a mishap. The government thus added this condition knowing that the beneficiaries are from the marginalised society and are unlikely to deposit money in the bank. Additionally, when an applicant asks how much amount of premium the insurers have made available for accident insurance to the account holders linked with PMJDY, National Payments Corporation of India refused to reveal, saying it is not in public interest and its commercial interest to disclose the information. This is problematic as the public is entitled to know the detail of any government scheme, including investment and benefits.

There are problems pertaining to unsettled claims as well. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, about 16 people die and 58 are injured every hour in road accidents in India and 100 million people have already been brought under the umbrella of government banking scheme, making them beneficiaries of the insurance scheme under the prime minister's financial inclusion plan. It is therefore quite possible at least several thousand claims could have been made for insurance money. However, very few people have come forward to claim their insurance money. NPCI informs that a total 34 cases of claims were received by December and not a single one has been settled so far. This gives a clearer picture of the much talked about scheme.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/jan-dhan-yojana-fineprint-modi-did-not-disclose>

Date accessed: 26/02/2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

GOVERNMENT

Green Clearance for Arunachal Hydel Projects Fast-Tracked

(Jay Mazoomdaar, *The Indian Express*, February 26, 2015)

An expert panel of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has shown the green light to a 1200-MW project on the Lohit river and soon it is going to consider the clearance of a 3097-MW hydel project in Dibang Valley as well. Surprisingly in doing this the ministry seems to have bent its own guidelines. On January 28, the expert appraisal committee (EAC) of the ministry recommended environmental clearance for the 1200-MW Kalai-II hydro electric project of Reliance Power subsidiary Kalai Power Pvt Ltd. The ministry has also listed the 3097-MW Etalin hydro electric project for the next EAC meeting on February 27. The Etalin Hydro Electric Power Company Ltd is a joint venture company of Jindal Power Ltd and Hydro Power Development Corporation of Arunachal Pradesh Ltd. The clearance to the Kalai plant goes against the guidelines issued in May 2013, which stated that once a project has been built in a river basin, all subsequent ones would be considered for clearance based on a cumulative impact assessment. Two of its orders issued in 2014 stated that approval of National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) for projects within 10 km of national parks and sanctuaries would form part of environment clearance. **“The cumulative impact assessment of the Lohit basin by IIT-Roorkee is still to be completed and the Kalai-II project has not even come up before the NBWL. But the ministry listed the project for environment clearance in the January 27-28 meeting of its EAC.** Clearance for the Etalin project too is subject to the cumulative impact assessment study.” Director of MoEF, B.B Barman, defended this by saying that though the Kalai-II hydel energy project has been recommended for environment clearance, it still has to meet a few conditions to be finally cleared. However, the director has refused to comment of a cumulative impact assessment for each project and the merit of considering Kalai II and Etalin- hydel projects for environment clearance without meeting this condition.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/green-clearance-for-arunachal-hydel-projects-fast-tracked/>

Date Accessed: 26.02.2015

(Rohit Chauhan)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Shanta Kumar Panel's Views Opposed by Major Grain Producing States

(Sanjeeb Mukherjee & Nitin Sethi, *Business Standard*, February 25, 2015)

The state government of Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and BJP governed Madhya Pradesh government have openly opposed some of the recommendations of the Shanta Kumar Committee on Food Corporation of India (FCI). They have opposed for lowering of grain entitlement under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) to 40% and cash transfer of food subsidy.

Madhya Pradesh government in its letter to the department of food and consumer affairs said "since the Act came into force, it has provided cheap grains to almost four million families and included landless labourers, rickshaw pullers and others into its ambit and hence does not agree to this suggestion to lower the entitlement." "It won't be prudent to remove any of the above mentioned categories of people from the ambit of the food Act after such a short time," the letter said. It also opposed the committee's suggestion to fix the taxes and commission on grains at 3-4 %. "This proposal is against the federal structure and Centre's intervention is not correct," Madhya Pradesh said.

Odisha, in its letter to the Union ministry of food and consumer affairs said, "The high-level committee, which had no mandate to go into its provisions, has questioned its viability." They said the panel had exceeded its brief in recommending lowering of grain entitlement under the Act.

Tamil Nadu said it is principally opposed to cash transfer of food subsidy under the Public Distribution System due to limited access and timely availability of commodities, while Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal said any move to lower grain procurement from north Indian states and shift it to eastern part of the country might create severe unrest and threaten the country's nutritional security.

Currently, more than 80 % of the wheat and rice produced by Punjab and Haryana is purchased by FCI annually either directly or through state agencies. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh, which is also a big contributor of grains, said any move to limit grain procurement from states which declare bonus over the Centre-determined minimum support price (MSP), might deprive it from having flexibility in procurement of grains for PDS.

On cash transfer of food subsidy, Madhya Pradesh said, "it would lead to a situation where beneficiaries would spend the amount for non purchases," while Odisha said, "it would lead to gradual reduction of procurement operations resulting in a food crisis."

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/shanta-kumar-panel-s-views-opposed-by-major-grain-producing-states-115022500022_1.html

Date Accessed: 25.2.2015

(Shruti Issar)

NDA Pulls out UPA Report to Restrict Gram Sabha Veto

(Jay Mazoomdaar, *The Indian Express*, February 24, 2015)

The NDA government at the Centre has decided to refer to a report submitted by a panel set up by the UPA government to explain its refusal to grant statutory veto powers over certain infrastructure projects to gram sabhas under Forests Rights Act (FRA). In a meeting held in January, the PMO overruled objections raised by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) and asked the Environment Ministry to draft revised guidelines, which would then allow district collectors to clear diversion of forest land in the process of restricting the scope of gram sabhas to decide on such projects. . During the meeting the Environment Ministry decided to formulate draft guidelines delineating the Forest Clearance (FC) process in light of the December 2012 UPA government report approved by the then Prime Minister which concluded that the FRA did not grant a statutory veto of gram sabhas over infrastructure projects . The Ministry of Environment sent its draft guidelines to the DoLA (Department of Legal Affairs) for legal vetting and to the MoTA for its views in February. The former department was to finalise the draft guidelines and send the same to the MoEF. Ten days were given to DoLA to send its comments to the department. "Echoing the 2012 UPA-II report, the draft guidelines stated that "none of the these Acts (the FCA, FRA, PESA and Land Acquisition Act) stipulates that processes stipulated under any other Act shall first be initiated or completed, before granting approval under any of these Acts". Based on the 2012 report, the latest Environment Ministry draft has exempted projects under five categories from obtaining the gram sabhas' consent: "those where statutory mandated consultation has been carried out; projects that require public hearing for environmental clearance; linear projects; those on private forest land; and minor public utility projects". In December 2014, only because of the repeated interventions of the Tribal Affairs Ministry that Environment Minister Prakash Javdekar sent the draft guidelines to Tribal Affairs Minister Prakash Javdekar for his comments. "On December 28, Oram's ministry responded with its own guidelines that differed from the draft on three key issues: a District Level Committee under FRA, not District Collector, to certify if process of recognition and vesting of forest rights is complete; no

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exemption to linear projects, and no exemption to projects in areas that house scheduled tribes since the FRA also applies to Other Traditional Forest Dwellers". Following this the Environment Ministry asked the Tribal Affairs Ministry not to move forward on its draft before the January 2015 meeting.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/nda-pulls-out-upa-report-to-restrict-gram-sabha-veto/99/>

Date Accessed: 26.02.2015

(Rohit Chauhan)

The NDA Government Promised Total Sanitation in Schools, but it Might be Difficult to Achieve

(Leela Prasad, *The Indian Express*, February 24, 2015)

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has promised that every school in India would have functional toilets by August 15, 2015. The construction of toilets officially began on October 2 when the Prime Minister launched the 'Swachh Bharat' mission. A total of 220,359 schools are being supported since the program's inception, and 257,008 new toilets are to be constructed, out of which 102,717 toilets would be for girls.

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, they have achieved a "100% booking" for construction of new toilets and only 52% for repairing 162,571 dysfunctional toilets. The Progress Monitoring report released by the ministry lists down state-wise figures in two sets, new toilets and dysfunctional toilets. It shows that work at only 39,996 new toilets and 1,424 dysfunctional toilets have been completed in the last five months. The government is currently building at a rate of 8,000 new toilets per month if the current figures are up to date. At this rate, it would take them around 32 months to build all the 257,008 toilets. With August 15 just three months away, the government could construct only around 1,50,000 toilets. The Ministry of Human Resource and Development, has identified that 80% of schools in seven states are without toilets. Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar and Assam are the seven states where, barring Madhya Pradesh (18,683), there is a requirement of over 20,000 toilets. Bihar tops the list where 38,657 toilets are required.

In Andhra Pradesh, no new toilets have been constructed so far. West Bengal has completed 31% of the 26,406 new toilets required; Bihar 5,728/38,657, Madhya Pradesh 1,563/18,683 and Odisha 2,876/21,655. No new toilets have been completed in 17 states in total. Prime Minister has also asked the 543 MPs to spend 50% of their MPLAD

funds on constructing toilets. As of February, more than 90% of our MPs, including Modi, are yet to start spending.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/modi-promised-total-sanitation-in-schools-but-it-might-be-difficult-to-achieve-here-is-why/99/>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

Corporate Espionage: Assocham Pitches for Legalising Lobbying

(*The Financial Express*, February 22, 2015)

In the wake of a major crack down on 'corporate espionage' involving private sector companies allegedly procuring secret official documents illegally, Associated chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) has pitched for legalising lobbying to improve transparency in government-industry dealings. It is worth mentioning here that during the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime the then Corporate Affairs Minister Sachin Pilot had favoured putting in place a proper framework for lobbying while defining what is legal and what is not.

Last week, senior executives from top energy firms and consultants were among several people arrested in the corporate espionage scandal emanating from the Petroleum Ministry in which classified documents, including an input for upcoming Finance Minister's budget speech were allegedly leaked. Calling for transparency in the decision-making process, industry body Assocham wondered why policies which have a bearing on corporates should be "shrouded in secrecy". Demanding that the NDA government implement in "letter and spirit" its slogan of minimum government and maximum governance, Assocham said the only way to get rid of 'corporate espionage' from the web of state machinery is by introducing complete transparency and demolishing the four walls of secrecy around the process of "decision-making".

Assocham Secretary General D S Rawat stated that "What we need is strong regulators, open decision making. Even the Budget making should also be done in a transparent manner and this practice of changing and altering tax slabs, rates every year should be stopped. There should be long term policies with clear vision with the fair and transparent rules of the game."

<http://www.financialexpress.com/article/economy/corporate-espionage-asso-cham-pitches-for-legalising-lobbying/46026/>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Experts against Draft National IPR Policy

(G. Krishnakumar, *The Hindu*, February 22, 2015)

This article talks about the draft National IPR Policy prepared by the Centre's IPR Think Tank that has come under harsh criticism from experts. Prof. Gopalakrishnan, the chief negotiator representing India at the World Intellectual Property Organisation on traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions since 2010, said that nothing was mentioned about health, food security, and environment in the draft policy. He said that the policy focused only on its role as a research incentive, that too not properly, and fails to serve the purpose of access facilitation.

The measures suggested in the draft policy called for large government funding for protecting and promoting foreign IP in India even though it stated that the primary obligation of protecting IP rights was on the IP owners. He added, "Moreover, the reference to State legislations in the context of copyright protection showed how the balance in the policy was tilted in favour of IP holders against society." The draft policy is also criticized for making no effort to find out the real need for and the role of IP in promoting innovation in formal/informal sectors. Further, the draft policy mentions that the new changes in the IP laws in India are being enjoyed by foreign IP holders.

The experts warn against drafting an IP policy hurriedly. It is to be noted that drafting an IP policy for India hurriedly and without conducting the required studies on the impact of existing IP laws on the basic needs of large sections of the Indian population would give a wrong impression on India's ability to generate a balanced IP policy.

<http://www.thehindu.com/features/education/experts-come-out-against-draft-national-ipr-policy/article6922144.ece>

Date accessed: 26/2/2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

EDUCATION

Body for School Fee Regulation Sought

(*Daily Pioneer*, February 25, 2015)

Educationists and civil society organizations in Madhya Pradesh have advocated for a regulatory body on school fee. Under the banner of 'Shiksha Adhikar Manch' submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to check on arbitrary attitude of the private schools, who charges exorbitant fee.

Shiksha Adhikar Manch Secretary Anil Sadgopal said, "We have handed over a memorandum with three-point demand to the Chief Minister Shivraj. Our demands mainly include constitution of 'fee monitoring and regulatory committee' for the academic session 2015-2016 to check the tuition fee charged by the private schools and all the other additional expenses forcibly imposed on the parents."

The group has also raised concerns regarding curriculum and textbooks of private schools. In their second demand the Manch demanded for an autonomous and duly authorised 'Academic Committee' to monitor the rates of the textbooks, workbooks and other educational material fixed or recommended by the private schools so that it can be ensured that the private schools are imparting education as per the constitution and 'National curriculum framework-2005'.

The third demand stated that the "State Government should present three year plan in the legislative assembly to make the government schools equivalent to central schools (Kendriya Vidyalaya) in terms of infrastructure and other facilities like ensuring teacher-student ratio, computer training, physical education, dance classes and equivalent curriculum to physically challenged."

<http://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/bhopal/body-for-school-fee-regulation-sought.html>

Date Accessed: 25.02.2015

(Jeet Singh)

Two UPA-Proposed Education Bills likely in Budget Session

(Prashant K. Nanda, *Livemint*, February 23, 2015)

The HRD Ministry is likely to introduce two bills in the budget session of the Parliament. Both the proposals were gloated by the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, but did not lead to legislation. The first Bill aims to digitize all academic credentials and another will create a statutory body for the distance education sector. Digitization of academic records aims to help companies in the background screening of aspiring or existing employees. Regulating distance education is necessary since distance education is facing a trust deficit in a regulatory vacuum. However, distance education has huge potential in helping India improve its higher education enrolment.

Digitization of records is likely to cover a million schools, over 38,000 colleges and over 650 universities. The process may be started with central universities and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The legislation related to distance education will lay down standards for offering higher education programmes and prescribe

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facilities, staffing patterns and staff qualifications and enforce the same. It will also supervise online education.

“According to C.R.K. Murthy, a professor at Indira Gandhi National Open University, the establishment of a distance education regulator which can assure quality, changing the way departments often see distance education merely as a cash cow and special attention on private universities churning out “cheap degrees” will be good for the sector.”

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/gxcXE3q2o2KkpVfLX7N4H/Two-education-bills-likely-in-budget-session.html>

Date accessed: 26/2/2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

HEALTH

Amicus Curiae Tells Delhi HC to Ban Junk Food in Schools

(Down to Earth, February 20, 2015)

The Amicus curiae made some recommendations to improve the draft guidelines formulated by an expert committee on the regulation of the sale of junk food in school. In 2010, Uday Foundation, a non-profit organisation, had filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Delhi High Court to ban junk food and carbonated drinks in schools in Delhi. The PIL also sought to initiate measures to deter the availability of fast food, and food that is unhygienic or contains unhealthy ingredients within 500 yards of school premises in Delhi; to direct the respondents to formulate a comprehensive policy for school canteens which lays emphasis on healthy nutrition amongst school children and to regulate advertisements of such food in the media.

Sanyat Lodha, the Amicus Curiae suggested the use of term ‘junk food’ along with the term ‘high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) as such terms are easily identifiable by a layperson although the respondents in the case had sought to delete the term ‘junk food’ claiming that it was not a scientific term and was not part of any category of foods defined under the Food Safety Act, 2006.

The Amicus Curiae recommended colour coding of food categories to represent “foods that should be rarely eaten” (HFSS foods), “foods that must be sparingly eaten” and “foods that can be eaten regularly”. Countries such as Canada, Costa Rica and UK impose similar bans on food stuffs. Mr. Lodha also recommended a ban of junk food within school premises and recommended restricting their sale within 100 metres of the school premises. The Amicus Curiae also called for restricting the marketing and advertisements of HFSS foods, as in countries like Canada,

France and Sweden, by creating guidelines for the same.

There is also a need to establish a suitable monitoring and implementation agency through a responsible nodal body or person for effective implementation of policy on HFSS foods. The Amicus Curiae also suggested that canteen contracts in school “should include clauses prohibiting the sale of HFSS/junk food (including sweetened carbonated and non-carbonated drinks) on the school premises.”

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/amicus-curiae-recommends-banning-junk-food-schools-delhi-high-court>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015

(Afreen Faridi)

Rural Indian Children Receive Wrong Treatments for Deadly Ailments: Study

(The Economic Times, February 17, 2015)

A study conducted 340 health care providers in rural India has found that only few health care providers know the correct treatments for childhood diarrhoea and pneumonia. Both of these are leading killers of young children worldwide. Diarrhoea and pneumonia accounted for 24% of deaths among children 1 to 4 years old, totalling approximately 2 million deaths worldwide in 2011. The studies find that even when they health care providers know the correct treatments, they rarely prescribe them properly. The researchers measured the gap between what providers know and what they actually do - the “know-do” gap and found that even the providers knew the remedy were not able to perform. For instance, 72 per cent of providers reported they would prescribe oral rehydration salts - a life-saving, low-cost and readily available intervention - but only 17 per cent actually did so. Those who did prescribe ORS also added other unnecessary or harmful drugs.

Manoj Mohanan, a professor in Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, and lead author of the study commented that medical practitioners usually fail to prescribe lifesaving treatments such as oral rehydration salts (ORS). Instead, they typically prescribe unnecessary antibiotics or other potentially harmful alternatives. The study found that 80% of the medical providers had no medical degree. almost 72 per cent of providers gave antibiotics or potentially harmful treatments without ORS. Providers with formal medical training still had large gaps between what they knew and did, but were significantly less likely to prescribe harmful medical treatments.

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The standardised patients did not ask for antibiotics, but almost all of them were prescribed the same. This study gives a picture of the dismal conditions of affordable health infrastructure in the country.

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-02-17/news/59232555_1_providers-ors-oral-rehydration-salts

Date accessed: 26/2/2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

TRANSPORT

Steps to be Taken to Boost Cargo Traffic at ICTT

(*Mathrubhumi*, February 25, 2015)

Worried over poor performance of Vallarpadam International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), A joint meeting of stakeholders of Cochin Port Trust decided to study situation and implement a concerted plan to attract new shipping services to ICTT that has not been able to attract much cargo so far.

“Noting that there were rooms for more cost reduction, the meeting resolved to proceed with a diagnostic approach to identify the existing factors leading to comparative disadvantages and put in place remedial measures.” A port trust release said, for this, it was decided to jointly engage a study by a consultant to come up with plans to bring cost competitiveness and service reliability while using ICTT.”

The stakeholders included Cochin Chamber of Commerce and service providers like Terminal Operator, Steamer Agents Association, and Custom House Agents Association.

<http://www.mathrubhumi.com/english/news/kerala/steps-to-be-taken-to-boost-cargo-traffic-at-ictt-158670.html>

Date Accessed: 25.02.2015

(Jeet Singh)

ENVIRONMENT

Oxford Study Casts Doubt on India's Tiger Success Story

(Prasun Solwarkar, *Hindustan Times*, February 24, 2015)

Flaws in a method commonly used in census of tigers and other rare wildlife has put the accuracy of such surveys in doubt, a new study by the University of Oxford, Indian Statistical Institute, and Wildlife Conservation Society suggests. According to this study one amongst recent

studies thought to be based on this method is India's national tiger survey (January 2015) which claimed a surprising but welcome 30 percent rise in tiger numbers in just four years.

Index-calibration often relies on measuring animal numbers accurately in a relatively small region using reliable, intensive and expensive methods (such as camera trapping) and then relating this measure to a more easily obtained, inexpensive indicator (such as animal track counts) by means of calibration. The calibrated-index is then used to extrapolate actual animal numbers over larger regions. The study further said that this approach has been popular among wildlife conservation agencies to generate animal numbers at a regional and national level. These numbers are then used to inform conservation efforts and direct resources worth millions of pounds. To investigate index-calibration a mathematical model describing the approach was created and then tested for its efficiency when different values, representing variations in data, were inputted. Under most conditions the model was shown to lose its efficiency and power to predict. This mathematical model was then tested on a real world example: attempting to derive tiger numbers from fieldwork data. The index-calibration model was shown to be unreliable again, with any high degree of success shown to be down to chance, rather like being dealt a single incredibly 'high value' poker hand, that could not be replicated.

Ullas Karanth, a co-author from the Wildlife Conservation Society, and a member of India's National Tiger Conservation Authority, said: 'This study exposes fundamental statistical weaknesses in the sampling, calibration and extrapolations that are at the core of methodology used by the Government to estimate India's numbers, thus undermining their reliability. We are not at all disputing that tigers numbers have increased in many locations in India in last 8 years, but the method employed to measure this increase is not sufficiently robust or accurate to measure changes at regional and country wide levels.'

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/chunk-ht-ui-worldsectionpage-topstories/oxford-study-casts-doubt-on-india-tiger-success-story/article1-1319970.aspx>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

World Bank Puts Environmental Damage in Sundarbans at Rs. 1,290 Cr a Year

(Hindu businessline, February 22, 2015)

Environmental damage in the climate change-hit islands of Sundarbans is costing India Rs. 1,290 crore each year, estimates a latest World Bank report. The cost of environmental damage associated with ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss is about Rs. 670 crore annually, while the cost of health effects due to poor environment is estimated at Rs. 620 crore, it says. The total figure of Rs. 1,290 crore is about 10 per cent of Sundarbans GDP in 2009.

Released recently, the report named ‘Building Resilience for Sustainable Development of the Sundarbans’ is prepared by the World Bank in collaboration with the West Bengal government. Sundarbans is an archipelago of 54 islands and is home to about 44 lakh people. A UNESCO World Heritage site, it is hit hard by an increase in floods, storms, salinity and erosion caused by rising sea—levels and global warming.

The main environmental health risks in the Sundarbans are inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene, and household air pollution from use of solid cooking fuels. These risk factors contribute considerably to mortality and morbidity, particularly among women and children. The report estimates nearly 80 per cent of the health cost is from health effects among children under five years of age. They have calculated that poor environmental conditions are responsible for 3,800 premature deaths and 1.9 million cases of illness every year, mainly among young children and adult women. The World Bank has suggested that benefits of interventions like embankment realignment, mangrove restoration and modernisation of aquaculture practices, controlling household pollution, improving water, sanitation and hygiene will significantly outweigh the costs.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/world-bank-puts-environmental-damage-in-sundarbans-at-rs-1290-cr/article6921916.ece>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015
(Devayani Bhushan)

Indian Coal-Based Thermal Plants are World’s Most Inefficient Says CSE Report

(The Hindu, February 22, 2015)

As per the Centre for Science and Environment’s (CSE) Green Rating Project (GRP), India’s coal-based thermal power plants are the world’s most inefficient. The study by CSE is the first of its kind done for this industrial sector by evaluating its environmental performance and compliance to yield “a clear picture of the environmental performance of the sector has emerged,” said CSE director general Sunita Narain.



The report found that even as the demand for power is increasing in India, the efficiency of Indian power plants is way below global levels. Such high levels of inefficiency will put inordinate stress on water and land resources besides worsening air and water pollution unless corrective measures are taken by the industry and policy makers.

The plants were rated on 60 parameters such as coal and water use, air and water pollution and ash management. The views of local community and the impact of thermal plants on their lives were also registered. A plant’s compliance of environmental laws was also duly noted.

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The Program Director of CSE's Sustainable Industrialisation team, Priyavrat Bhati, said, "The most striking part of the ranking is that 20 plants did not get a single leaf, which is a reflection of their particularly poor environmental performance."

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/indias-coalbased-thermal-power-plant-most-inefficient-in-the-world-cse-report/article6921140.ece?css=print>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015

(Afreen Faridi)

AGRICULTURE

PM Modi Seeks to Usher In Second Green Revolution through GM Crops

(Times of India, February 22, 2015)

Prime Minister Modi is betting on genetically modified (GM) crops to boost farm productivity in India and usher in a second Green Revolution. Mr. Modi was a supporter of GM crops even when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, at a time when Bt Cotton was introduced in India.

Groups associated with BJP staunchly oppose GM crops as they rely on seeds patented by multinational organisations. It is important to note that only a "handful of agrichemical and seeds companies dominate the global market for GM crops, including Monsanto Co., DuPont Pioneer, a unit of DuPont, Dow AgroSciences, a unit of Dow Chemical, and Syngenta." The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch has vowed to hold protests if GM crops are made commercially available.

In 2010, India had placed a moratorium on GM aubergine as there was uncertainty on the crop's effect on food safety and biodiversity. Field trial of other GM crops were also restricted due to non-provision of regulatory assent. However, in August 2014 the NDA government resumed field trials of selected GM crops. Shri. Prakash Jadvadekar, MoS Environment, Forest & Climate Change told Reuters, "Confined, safe field trials are on. It's a long process to find out whether it is fully safe or not." However, applicants still need to seek no-objection certificates from states where trials need to be conducted. Currently, states ruled by the BJP government are leading in trials. Maharashtra gave the green signal for trials of rice, chickpeas, corn and aubergine while Punjab and Delhi (during Governor's Rule) gave the go-ahead for mustard.

Manvendra Singh Inaniya, campaigned for Greenpeace India said, "The current government's rush with open field trials without addressing the fundamental loopholes in the regulatory mechanism is a matter for serious concern. This

leaves us vulnerable to contamination with untested and potentially hazardous GM food. We urge the Union government to roll back approvals given to open air field trials of GM crops."

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Modi-bets-on-GM-crops-for-second-green-revolution/articleshow/46333970.cms>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

LAW AND JUSTICE

Government's Will Seems to Act as Hurdle for Judicial Reforms

(Times of India, February 24, 2015)

Legal reform is one of the priorities of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, an intent it has reiterated through the President's address to the joint session of Parliament on Monday. However, in the last nine months the government has not been able to achieve much progress on judicial reforms.

The much debated National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), which replaced the Supreme Court collegium through a constitutional amendment, has been kept in abeyance for the lack of government's will to notify it. The unofficial reason, of course, is a pending litigation in the SC challenging the NJAC. But, sources said nothing prevents the government from notifying the NJAC and going ahead with framing of its rules and procedures. The government had through recent communications to the chief justices of high courts impressed upon them the need to improve the criminal justice system by strictly implementing the amendments made in the Code of Criminal Procedure and Civil Procedure Code. One of the issues raised was on repeated adjournments given by courts delaying the process of justice delivery and thus increasing the pendency list. A proposal was discussed to link adjournments with the judges appraisal system. However, all high courts have their own independent appraisal system and there has been no headway in bringing uniformity in judges' appraisal system across the country. The key to expediting justice delivery is to have a full strength subordinate judiciary. Currently, there are more than 4,400 vacancies against a sanctioned strength of 19,518. The High Courts too have a similar problem. Against a sanctioned strength of 984 judges there are at least 348 vacancies.

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One of the proposals of the government was to frame an All India Judicial Service on the lines of civil services, particularly, after several HCs told the government that one of the main difficulties faced by them was finding suitable candidates who can satisfy the eligibility conditions and are able to clear the written examinations. However, despite repeated attempts the government has been unable to convince the higher judiciary on constituting such a service for the recruitment of judicial officers.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Is-govts-will-the-hurdle-for-judicial-reforms/articleshow/46350323.cms>

Date Accessed: 24.02.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

INDIA AND WORLD

INDIA IN THE WORLD**Iran Port Role in Afghan Trade Pact***(The Telegraph, February 22, 2015)*

Indian and Afghanistan are about to sign a trade pact that proposes to use Chabahar port in Iran as an alternative trade route. It is expected to boost bilateral trade to around \$3 billion from \$700-800 million. The route bypasses the current route via Pakistan so that Afghanistan can open itself up to foreign investments.

Afghanistan Ambassador, Shaida Mohammad Abdali noted that India has already given money to upgrade the Chabahar port. Investing at the port will give India access to energy-rich Central Asia and increase the import of minerals from Afghanistan.

“On the SAIL-led consortium's project to develop iron ore mines in Hajigak, Abdali said it involved an investment of over \$11 billion and would take time.” Technical issues such as funding and rail link still needs to be assessed.

Afghanistan is fighting the misconception that it is not ready for business. “He said minerals, information technology, education, precious stones, construction and food processing were the ideal sectors to attract investments.” Moreover, it is also planning to re-open its commercial office in Calcutta, which was active till 1928.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150225/jsp/business/story_5280.jsp#.VO3NpUttIpe

Date Accessed: 25.2.2015

(Shriyam Gupta)

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**Iraq: UN Documents Rights Violations of Increasingly Sectarian Nature***(United Nations News Centre, February 23, 2015)*

A report produced jointly by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), noted increasing human rights violations and deteriorating rule of law in Iraq. Covering a period from 11 September to 10 December 2014, the report noted increased sectarian violence inflicted by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on diverse ethnic communities, including Turkmen, Shabaks, Christians, Yezidi, Sabaeans, Kaka'e, Faili Kurds, Arab Shi'a, and others.

Over “11,602 civilians have been killed and 21,766 wounded from the beginning of January until 10 December 2014. Between 1 June and 10 December 2014, when the conflict spread from Anbar to other areas of Iraq, at least 7,801 civilians were killed and 12,451 wounded.” Human rights violations include rapes, slavery, trafficking, forced recruitment of children and destruction of religious places. The report highlights that during the reporting period of three months around 165 executions were carried out by so called “courts” in ISIL-controlled areas. Even the Iraqi Security Forces have been responsible for violating human rights by targeting killing and other abuses.

Significant deaths in the crises have taken place due to secondary effects of violence such as lack of basic necessities like food, water and medical care. Many civilians are not being provided assistance as they are trapped in area controlled by the ISIL. Children, women and people with disability are particularly vulnerable in these circumstances.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50149#.VOWcVEttIpe>

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(Shriyam Gupta)

UN Health Agency Launches Billion Dollar Appeal to Tackle Soaring Needs in Four Crisis-Torn Countries*(United Nations News Centre, February 24, 2015)*

World Health Organization (WHO) has appealed to the world to contribute a billion dollar to support health needs for some 25 million people trapped in conflict in Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan and Syria. These four countries are categorized as “Grade 3” crises, which require the highest-level of response that the UN can deliver. The organization stated that the countries need assistance in all regards from ‘childhood vaccines to surgical care’.

“ Overall, the Health Cluster group of humanitarian organizations needs \$1 billion – \$322.7 million by WHO and \$687 million for its partner agencies – to deliver health services.” In Central African Republic, 1.4 million people in need of humanitarian health support with \$48 million needed by the health sector. Iraq requires \$218.7 million to support 4 million people. 3.3 million people needing humanitarian health support in South Sudan which would require about \$90 million. Lastly, Syria has 16.4 million people in need of humanitarian health support that would require \$687 million required by the health sector in Syria and neighboring countries.

INDIA AND WORLD

WHO has been working with its partner agencies to assist counties with immunization programs, delivering health care services, assisting in tackling non-communicable diseases like cancers, diabetes, heart and lung diseases and providing primary health care support to remote and besieged communities.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50168#.VO1hHkttIpE>

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(Shriyam Gupta)

U.N. Report Finds Torture Still Widespread in Afghan Jails

(Jessica Donati and Kay Johnson, *Reuters*, February 25, 2015)

A United Nations report noted that Afghan authorities torture or mistreat more than a third of 800 suspected Taliban detainees. The nation took complete responsibility to curb Taliban activity after foreign forces withdrew last year. Even though torture is illegal as per the Afghan law, it is frequently practised to extract information. Moreover, judiciary was still reliant on confessions as the basis for prosecution. "Detainees described 16 different methods of torture, including beatings, electric shocks and suspension."

UN noted in a "survey on torture that it issues every two years that there had been a 14 percent decrease in incidents compared with the previous reporting period, but torture in custody was a persistent problem." Decreased incidents were attributed to new government policies, better training on interrogation techniques and more inspections. Failure to prosecute personnel for torture has allowed it to continue.

The survey found that over 35% detainees were tortured or mistreated but only one incident of abuse has undergone prosecution since 2010. 'Credible report' of secret detainee sites has emerged which the UN needs to identify and shut down immediately.

Afghan government has accepted some of the UN's concern but noted that some of its facts are misleading. However, the government did accept that torture is a problem that needs to be curbed.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/02/25/afghanistan-torture-idINKBNOLT0R920150225>

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(Shriyam Gupta)

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