

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

Budget analyses over time are undergoing some transformative changes from mere accounting on annual revenue and expenditure data to a deeper policy reflection and its direction of a particular government. The size of economy, allocation of fund on several heads, announcement of schemes and programmes and raising revenue through various means can show the policy direction of an economy. The much expected first full 2015-16 budget of BJP led Union government has been tabled on 28th February 2015 in the Parliament of India. The instant debates aroused from several points of view, some are of the opinion that, it has laid a robust roadmap for India's growth-oriented economy, which would over time boost investment. The others express their worries that a mere cut in expenditure allocation social sector is a dangerous signal for a country like India, which is still exposed with multi-layered inequalities. Such reduction in social expenditure may help the government to restrain fiscal deficit, but would hit the vulnerable groups like women, children, minorities and disabled sections and would affect India's human development in the long run. The important centrally sponsored schemes, which were targeted to help the deprived and underprivileged of the nation would now be either transferred to state government or would wind up, though some would continue to be functioned through union government support. Some such schemes were directed to reduce massive hunger and malnutrition in India.

The budget on the contrary has laid a roadmap to improve economic efficiency to increase growth and investment. The reforms in direct tax policy through reducing corporate tax and abolishing wealth tax while tightening its indirect tax regime through GST are some such measures to boost investment. This would raise revenue, but within regressive, unequal and anti-poor frame. Thomas Piketty while speaking on such high inequality in his recent famous work on Capital in the Twenty First Century proposes measures on taxation reforms, especially by increasing wealth tax for addressing inequality, while noble prize-winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz gives talks about the entire tax system to improve economic efficiency and reduce inequality. Thus, according to him, a sensible reform of domestic tax code can simultaneously raise money, improve the performance of the economy, and address some of other biggest social problems, not just inequality, but joblessness and looming environmental catastrophe. The vicious circle of economic inequality leading to political inequality can thus be broken down by raising tax, and a visionary budget document can ensure such path breaking tax system to reduce high inequality. With a fair tax system, if people in the upper one percent pay their fair share of taxes to the government, the yawning gaps amongst different strata can be reduced. This also can ensure competition, which is presently engineered by the wealthy to protect their economic and political power.

Our cover story presents an alternative analysis of this union budget within a frame of equality and equity audit. Hope readers would find this analysis useful.

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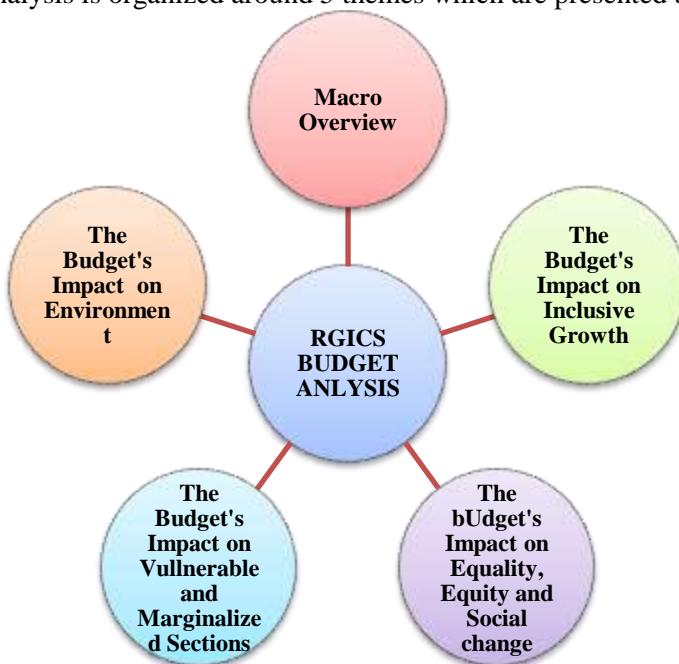
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Union Budget 2015-16 Analysis**Introduction**

Taxation and expenditure decisions under government budgets affect people differently – that depends on factors such as income levels, social status (including gender) and geographic location. Budgets inevitably produce ‘winners’ and ‘losers’.

Budgets are invariably analyzed from an economic and financial perspective, and there is very little analysis of the social and political context and the impact of budgetary policy and of budgets. We present here an overview of the ‘RGICS Budget analysis 2015-16’.

The RGICS budget analysis is organized around 5 themes which are presented below.

**Theme 1: Macro Overview****Table 1: Macro Economic Indicators**

Indicators	2013-14	2014-15 (RE)	2015-16 (BE)	Target for 2016-17	Target for 2017-18
GDP at current market prices (2011-12 series) (Rs. in Crore)	11345056	12653762	14108945		
Growth rate of GDP (in %)	13.6	11.5	11.5		
Fiscal Deficit (% of GDP)	4.6	4.1	3.9	3.5	3
Revenue Deficit (% of GDP)	3.3	2.9	2.8	2.4	2
Gross Tax Revenue (% of GDP)	10	9.9	10.3	10.5	10.7
Current Account Balance (Rs in Crore)	-187750	-108103*			
CAD (% of GDP)	1.7				
Inflation rate for February (based on CPI) (in %)	10.8	8.8	5.15		

Note : *: April- September

Source: Union Budget 2015-16

Economic Survey 2014-15

MOSPI, GOI

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The macro-economic indicators presented in table 1 clearly indicate the fiscal condition of the country. The growth rate of GDP has declined after 2013-14. The gross tax revenue has witnessed a marginal decline in 2014-15 (RE) as compared to 2013-14.

Theme 2: The Budget's Impact on Inclusive Growth

The mandate of the UPA government was to ensure inclusive growth and not mere economic growth and prosperity in India. The present government's policy direction reflects a deviation from this. Many announcements and decisions of the union budget will lead to *exclusionary growth*. Some of these are **social expenditure cuts, increase in indirect tax burden and 'leaning' towards private and corporate economic culture**.

Major decisions of the NDA government in Budget 2015-16 on the front of revenue and expenditure includes:

- **Reduction in total expenditure:** The total expenditure has declined from Rs.17,94,892 crore in 2014-15 (BE) to Rs.17,77,477 crore in 2015-16 (BE) (0.98% decline, about 12.6% of GDP).
- **Reduction in plan expenditure:** The decline in expenditure occurs mostly on account of Rs. 1,09,723 crore reduction of Plan expenditure from Rs 5,75,000 to Rs 4,65,277 (28.58% decline).
- **Reduction in social expenditure:** There is a clear decline in the social sector expenditures as a share of GDP (to 2.57% from 2.84% between 2014-15 and 2015-16 (Table 2). The share of social expenditure to total expenditure of the Union government has also declined to 20.4% 2015-16 from 21.4% in 2014-15. This reduced social expenditure shows the lack of priority accorded to the social sector by this Union government.

Table 2: Social Sector Expenditures by Union Government

Ministries/ Department	(Rs. in Crore)			
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15 (RE)	2015-16 (BE)
Ministry of Culture	1388	1989	2159	2169
Department of Drinking Water/ Sanitation	12969	11941	12107	6244
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (including AYUSH)	27885	30135	31965	33282
Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation	933	1084	3413	5634
Ministry of Human Resource Development	66055	71322	70505	69075
Ministry of Labour and Employment	3645	4233	4311	5361
Ministry of Minority Affairs	2174	3027	3165	3738
Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment	4940	5515	5893	7162
Ministry of Tribal Affairs	3073	3839	3872	4819
Department of Urban Development	6541	7297	11013	16832
Ministry of Women and Child Development	17036	18037	18588	10382
Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports	871	1123	1157	1541
Department of Rural Development	50187	58666	68204	71695
Total expenditure under Social Sector Ministries/ Departments (excluding food subsidy)	197697	217565	235662	236722
Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (Food Subsidy)	86677	93317	123366	125474
Total expenditure under Social Sector Ministries/ Departments (including food subsidy)	284374	310882	359028	362195
GDP at current market prices (2011-12 series)	9988540	11345056	12653762	14108945
Share of social sector expenditure (excluding food subsidy) as a % of GDP	1.98	1.92	1.86	1.68
Share of social sector expenditure (including food subsidy) as a % of GDP	2.85	2.74	2.84	2.57

Source: Compiled by CBGA

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- Social Sector Programmes Transferred to States without adequate funding for implementation:** The Union budget not only transferred many crucial programmes from the centre to the states but also stated that due to higher devolution of taxes to the states¹ the Normal Central Assistance, Special Plan Assistance, Special Central Assistance and Additional Central Assistance would be discontinued and deemed to be subsumed in the devolution itself. Eight central schemes have been discontinued, and some Centrally Sponsored Schemes would be implemented with a changed pattern of sharing of resources, with states contributing a higher share.

Table 3 (prepared by CBGA) below shows that while states' share in central taxes and Non-plan grants as a share of GDP does show an increase, the total Union resources reveals a decline from last year's budgeted expenditure.

Table 3: Composition and structure of transfer of resources to States

	2014-15 (BE)	2015-16 (BE)
States share of taxes and duties (Rs. in Crore)	382216	523958
Non plan grants and loans to states (Rs. in Crore)	70019	108630
Central Assistance to states (Rs. in Crore)	329712	195778
Total union resources transferred to states * (Rs. in Crore)	781947	828366
GDP at current market prices (2011-12 series) (Rs. in Crore)	12653762	14108945
States share of taxes and duties as % of GDP	3	3.7
Non plan grants and loans to states as % of GDP	0.6	0.8
Central Assistance to states as % of GDP	2.6	1.4
Total union resources transferred to states as % of GDP	6.2	5.9

Note: Total union resources comprises of states' share in central taxes, non-plan grants, Central Assistance to state, Assistance for Central and Centrally sponsored schemes

Source: Compiled by CBGA

- Regressive direct tax policy and greater reliance on indirect taxes:** The proposals relating to Personal Income Tax in the present budget would make Income Tax base even narrower, and those pertaining to the abolition of Wealth Tax (being replaced by a 2 % additional surcharge on Income Tax on the super-rich), would further weaken the limited progressivity in India's direct tax system.

Such regressive direct tax policy and greater reliance on indirect taxes would definitely increase the overall burden on the common and poorer sections of society. The present government has attempted some significant proposals to shift the overall tax policy towards augmenting indirect tax revenues; implementation of GST from 2016 is one such remarkable step.

- Reduction in corporate tax:** To accelerate economic growth, the present government has emphasized on manufacturing sector; and to boost investment, the union budget has declared that corporate tax would be reduced from 30% to 25% over the next four years, starting in next financial Year.
- General Anti Avoidance Rules (GAAR) has been deferred by two years to apply prospectively from 2017**

Theme 3: The Budget's Impact on Equality, Equity and Social Change

The union budget 2015-16 can well be understood by examining the following dimensions separately in order to see the impact of the budget on equality, equity and social change.

¹ Recommendation of 14th Finance commission

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- **Widening Regional Inequality:** In Union Budget 2015-16, no new schemes or programmes have been announced for enhancing equality and parity across regions and amongst people. Rather there has been an effort to distort some very important schemes of UPA, which directly deal with regional economic imbalance. Thus the schemes like Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) would be delinked from the Union Budget and Indira AwasYojna (IAY) and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) would possibly be transferred to State governments.
- **Health:** The total allocation in the present union budget for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare have decreased by about Rs. 6000 crore. CBGA (2015) report however, pointed out that this cut would be seen under the changing sharing pattern of revenues and expenditure between Centre and States and the increased share of fund devolution to States by the FFC. Therefore to ensure overall development in health, states now need to prioritize this sector with possible public spending capacity.
- **Education:** Education is another sector, where the present budget has attempted to shift the burden of financing central schemes to states. CBGA (2015) has estimated a reduction of 28.5 % and 41 % from the 2014-15 Budget Estimates in Union Budget 2015-16 in the total allocations for SSA and MDM, which are now Rs. 22,000 crore and Rs. 7,811 crore respectively. CBGA (2015) also points out that the budget reported a change in the resource sharing pattern under Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Rashtriya Uchcha Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) – the two Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSSs) that seek to promote secondary and higher education in India. The budget allocation under RMSA has decreased by 57% and RUSA by 47%, from the 2014-15(BE).
- **Rural Development:** To ensure equality, the country needs to address the challenges of its rural sector very aggressively. The allocation for MGNREGA in union budget 2015-16 stands at Rs. 34,699 crore, which is not a significant increase over the previous years. It is a programme that needs a boost both in terms of financial allocation as well as in implementation, which can substantially reduce the gap in wage rates and consumption pattern between rural and urban India. Further, in the budget 2014-15, Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rural Mission and the Village Entrepreneurship Start-up Programme was introduced with an initial allocation of Rs. 100 crore in each. To make such programme successful and pro-people and further to bring social change in the long run, more public investment and commitments are essential but not by envisioning PPP model.
- **Agriculture:** Agriculture is another sector, which needs attention to reduce rural urban disparity. But the allocation for the Ministry of Agriculture in the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation shows a decline. This decline is to the extent of Rs. 1713 crore (Rs. 24,910 crore in 2015-16 (BE) from Rs. 26,623 crore in the 2014-15 (RE) and to the tune of Rs. 2,848 crore in 2015-16 (BE) compared to 2014-15 (BE). National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) has also experienced a decline in the allocation in the current union budget over the Revised Estimate of 2014-15. The allocations provisioned under the Department for Land Resources (DoLR) within the Ministry of Rural Development, the administrative unit responsible for the development of dryland/rainfed agriculture in the country has declined in absolute terms to Rs. 1637.50 crore in 2015-16 (BE) compared to Rs. 3759.13 crore in 2014-15 (BE). Like other sectors, there has been a major reshuffle in the current Union Budget with regard to implementation of erstwhile schemes of the Union Government in agriculture.
- **Food Security and Nutritional Commitments:** The total food subsidy has increased in absolute terms from Rs. 70,926 crore in 2007-08 to Rs. 243,811 crore in 2015-16 (BE), but total subsidy as a share of GDP has declined since 2012-13. The total subsidy as a share of the total Union Budget was 9.95 % in 2007-08, which increased to 18.23 % in 2012-13, and then started to decline thereafter continuously, to reach 13.72 % in the current budget.

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Theme 4: The Budget's Impact on Vulnerable and Marginalized Section

- **Women:** The magnitude of Gender Budget Statement(GBS) in budget 2015-16 is Rs 79258 crore, whereas in 2013-14 GBS was Rs 97134 crore. This is indicative of the low priority given to women and their welfare by the present government. In addition to this, number of schemes meant for girls and women have been withdrawn. Some Union government schemes have been discontinued and some of the schemes retained by the Union government have been reduced allocations; many such schemes are those which had a 30% benefits earmarked for women. Most of the schemes meant for women have been allocated less than Rs 100 crores
- **Children:** Child health received 0.16 % share in the Union Budget 2014-15 (BE), and its share has come down to 0.13 per cent in Union Budget 2015-16. In 2015-16 (BE), the total allocation for ICDS is Rs. 8448.8 crore with an additional budget of Rs. 1500 crore, if extra funds get generated by tax buoyancy. However, ICDS in its universalisation and in its third phase of expansion is facing many challenges such as inadequate availability of space for AnganwadiCentres (AWCs), vacant posts, low focus on growth monitoring, low focus on early childhood etc.
- **Dalits and Adivasis:** The total resources earmarked for the Dalits and Adivasis have clearly witnessed a decline from the previous years. While the allocations reported in SCSP (The Scheduled Caste Sub Plan) have declined by 28.5% (from Rs. 43,208 crore in 2014- 15 BE to Rs. 30,851 crore in 2015-16 BE); allocations reported in TSP (Tribal Sub Plan) have declined by one-fourth (from Rs. 26,715 in 2014-15 BE to Rs. 19,980 in 2015-16 BE).

Major Announcements for Dalits and Adivasis in Union Budget 2015-16

- Priority for lending by MUDRA Bank to be given to SCs and STs for their entrepreneurial development. MUDRA Bank set up with corpus of Rs. 20,000 crore, and credit guarantee corpus of Rs. 3,000 crore.
- Van Bandhu KalyanYojana to be a major umbrella programme under which all the major schemes would run. Existing Van BandhuKalyanYojana will be merged under the umbrella programme.
- **Minorities welfare:** Although religious minorities comprise one-fifth of Indian population, budgetary allocations for their development has only been 0.23% of the total Union Budget 2015-16. Budgetary allocation for minorities' welfare has remained stagnant at around Rs. 3,700 crore in the two consecutive budgets of the present government. In terms of the new announcement in the budget 2015-16, an integrated education and livelihood scheme called 'Nai Manzil' will be launched this year to enable Minority Youth who do not have a formal school leaving certificate to obtain one and find better employment.
- **Disabled:** As noted by CBGA (2015) report, no allocation to the National Mental Health Programme, which is the only programme that has components for community mental health has been made. There has been a marginal increase of Rs.4 crore in the estimated overall budget of the Department of Disability Affairs. This increase is on the scheme for assistive devices. Allocation to the programme "Sports for the Disabled" by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has been reduced. Moreover, the only community initiative for persons with psychosocial disabilities finds no allocation in the budget.

Theme 5: The Budget's Impact on Environment

There is no policy framework for environmental sustainability along with government's roadmap for fast track growth through resource depletion and rent-thick sector like coal. Further, budget has no concrete road map to implement the ambitious green energy targets. Budget 2015-16 is highly environment unfriendly as:

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- It reduces the allocation for the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change substantively to Rs 1,681.60 crore (BE) from Rs 1,764.60 crore (RE) (4.94% decline) in 2014-15 (Economic Times, 2015). It has reduced budget allocation for important 'Project Tiger' to Rs 136.46 crore from Rs 161.02 crore in 2014-15 (18.22% decline). This comes after a 30% rise in the tiger population reported in January. (Economic Times, 2015)
- In case of need of more funds, provisions will be enabled to levy Swachh Bharat cess at a rate of 2 % or less on all or certain services (CBGA, 2015) instead of government spending. This is a clear sign of shifting the expenditure burden to the common people.

Last, but the not the least, as pointed out by CBGA (2015) report, this expansion in target for renewable energy indicates that there is too much emphasis on projects rather than building competitive market environment such as improving flexibility in Power Purchase Agreements with States, building skilled manpower, etc. Though, 100% FDIs are permitted in renewable energy sector, still it is important to cater to these issues with the government's own investment and overall policy framework.

Remarks

The overview presented above clearly indicates the priorities of the present government. The analysis highlights the risks to the marginalized arising from this budget along with the benefits provided in the budget for the dominant classes. Further it also helps to understand how this budget will impact the core Constitutional goal of equality.

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- Union Budget 2015-16

Prepared By

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HEADLINES

Misplaced Priorities: Union Budget 2015-16 Spends less than 10-year Average on Public Health

(Rajesh Pandathil, *Firstpost*, March 01, 2015)

Even as swine flu spreads across the country, the Union Budget 2015-16 does not pay adequate heed to public health spending in the country. Last year, the Finance Minister had earmarked Rs 30,645 crore, which was further cut by 20% due to the fiscal strains. The government has allocated Rs 33,152 crore to the health sector, this year. As a percent of total expenditure it is just 1.86%, which is also the second lowest in the last 10 years.

In the Budget, the Minister has made proposals to set up All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in J&K, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Assam. Another AIIMS-like institution will come up in Bihar too. However, this is not possible in the near future. The July budget had also proposed to set up four AIIMS-like institutions in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The fund allocated for this was a mere Rs 500 crore. There is no update on the progress of this plan yet. Considering the cut in the health allocation last year, it is quite probable that the government has not made any headway on this. Experts are disappointed with the measures taken as they fail to address many burning issues that need urgent attention.

"It is not clear how the marginal increase in allocation will take care of the family planning agenda and the new AIIMS," commented Population Foundation of India executive director Poonam Muttreja. Health sector experts also claim an urgent need to allocate funds to control disease outbreaks, such as swine flu. While the US spends 8.3% of its GDP on public health, and China 3%, India is yet to give the required attention, despite tall claims of universal health coverage of the government.

<http://www.firstpost.com/business/misplaced-priorities-budget-2015-spends-less-10-year-average-public-healthcare-2129571.html>

Date accessed: 4.3.2015
(Kasturi Mishra)

Core Sector Growth Slows to 13-Month Low of 1.8% in January, 2015

(*Millennium Post*, March 03, 2015)

Negative growth in crude oil and natural gas and low growth in steel, cement and electricity have had a negative impact on the overall growth rate of core industries. The eight core sector industries - coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity had expanded by 3.7% in January, 2014. The growth was 2.4% in December 2014. The 1.8% growth in January 2015 is the slowest in the 13 months of the revised data.

The core sector contributes 38% to the overall industrial production, a parameter that RBI takes into account while framing its monetary policy. According to the data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry, production of crude oil and natural gas contracted by 2.3% and 6.6% respectively. Output in steel, cement and electricity registered growth during the month under review, but the expansion is lower as compared to that in January 2014. However, coal and refinery products output grew by 1.7 per cent and 4.7% respectively against 1.2% and contraction of 4.2% in the year ago period. During April-January period, the eight sectors grew by 4.1% as against 4% in the same period of the previous fiscal.

As per HSBC India Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), manufacturing growth slipped to a three-month low in January on slower pace of order flows from domestic and global markets. The rating agency ICRA said, "The sluggish performance of available lead indicators, such as the low growth of core industries and automobile production as well as the contraction in merchandise exports, foretell a muted outlook for IIP growth for January 2015." According to analysts, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may cut key interest rates, as the fiscal measures announced in the Union Budget are unlikely to disturb the "disinflation" trend.

<http://www.millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=97042>

Date accessed: 4.3.2015
(Kasturi Mishra)

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 & Diu	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
Karnataka	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

Rural Crisis Imminent as Budget Gives Villages a Miss

(Jitendra, *Down to Earth*, March 01, 2015)

India is staring at a rural economic crisis, a fact that even the latest economic survey accepts. But it looks like the finance minister believes otherwise because the total budgetary allocation for rural development this year is the lowest in the past three years. The total allocation for rural schemes this year is Rs 79,526 crore, which is five per cent lower than last year's allocation of Rs 83,852 crore. This cut comes at a time when most villages are witnessing reverse migration that has resulted in a three per cent dip in rural wage growth and a huge backlog of unpaid salary under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The budgetary allocation for the employment scheme is Rs 34,700 crore—a marginal Rs 700 crore more than last year's allocation. And the current unpaid wages under the scheme stand at Rs 4,350 crore.

The Centre's flagship programme for rural road construction, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak yojana (PMGSY), has also seen a cut in allocations. Just Rs 10,100 crore has been allocated for the scheme, which received Rs 14,400 crore in the last budget. The cut comes despite the fact that the scheme failed to meet last year's road target because of budgetary shortage. "Last year, the target was to construct 21,000 km rural roads, but we had funds for only 14,000 km. We were expecting additional funds to meet this year's target," said a senior PMGSY official.

The budget also reduced allocation for the pension scheme, National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) to Rs 9,000 crore from last year's Rs 10,547 crore. As part of its plan to give autonomy to states, the Centre has announced that states would design and implement the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), which supports self-help groups of women.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/rural-crisis-imminent-budget-gives-villages-miss>

Date Accessed: 03.03.2015
(Devyani Bhushan)

Government Readies Stake Sale Pipeline Worth Rs 30k Crore

(Arup Roychoudhury & Jayshree P Upadhyay, *Business Standard*, March 4, 2015)

The target in 2015-16 at Rs 69500 crore for disinvestment stands highest ever. For the target, the government has in place a pipeline, in various stages of regulatory approval, said Disinvestment Secretary Aradhana Johri on Tuesday, March 3rd. "In terms of the stocks we have initiated approvals for, the pipeline would be more than Rs 30,000 crore," she said.

The disinvestment target for 2015-16 can be divided into two parts

1. Rs 41,000 crore from minority stake sale in listed public sector undertakings (PSUs)
2. Rs 28,500 crore from what the Budget termed "strategic sales"

The companies in the pipeline for a 5-10 per cent stake sale might include Nalco, NMDC, NHPC, Bhel, Neyveli Lignite, Indian Oil, Dredging Corp, CONCOR, Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers, Hindustan Copper and ONGC. "This is based on the names that have come before the Cabinet in the past few months and the list of companies in which the Centre holds more than 75 per cent stake (which it will have to bring below that threshold by 2017, according to Securities and Exchange Board of India guidelines.)"

For 2014-15 disinvestment target, the government had planned to sell 5% stake in ONGC, however, the decision was shelved due to depressed global crude oil prices and delays in the proposed subsidy-sharing mechanism between the government and upstream companies.

Johri said, "There is limited elbow room to sell because if you look at the composition of our pipeline, almost half the stocks are mines and metals, for which the markets are down globally. And, about 25 per cent of the stocks are oil stocks, where there are issues of subsidy sharing and market conditions."

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/govt-readies-stake-sale-pipeline-worth-rs-30k-cr-115030300363_1.html

Date Accessed: 5.3.2015
(Shruti Issar)

Budget 2015 Proves a Dampener for Climate Action

(Geetika Singh, *Millennium Post*, March 02, 2015)

The budget presented by Finance Minister is a disappointing one if one considers investments required for climate change adaptation and mitigation. The emphasis was primarily on increasing the irrigated area, improving the efficiency of existing irrigation systems, promoting agro-based industry for value addition and increasing farm incomes, and reasonable prices for farm produce.

Focusing on insurance through the lens of Jan Suraksha (people's security), the finance minister raised a concern, saying that "large proportion of India's population is without insurance of any kind—health, accidental or life". At first glance, it seems like a proactive step on the part of the government for people's welfare, though questions emerge about insurance in the event of a catastrophic event.

ECONOMY

Insurance of crop and livestock is a crucial component of financial adaptation measure, but it found no mention in the Union budget. Since the past year, India has maintained that it has been spending more than 2.6 per cent of its gross domestic product to deal with the challenges of climate change. The specific areas which got more focus, especially with respect to climate change adaptation, were agriculture, water resources, health and sanitation, forest, coastal zone infrastructure and extreme weather events. But other major concerns, were hardly addressed in the budget.

On February 24, days before the Union budget, questions on the effects of climate change and measures taken by the government were discussed in the Lok Sabha., the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, had stated, “(The UPA) government had released National Action Plan on Climate Change on June 30, 2008, that outlines eight missions and other initiatives, including disaster management response to extreme climate events, by enhancing measures for prevention, mitigation and preparedness to respond to the extreme climate events and setting up early warning system.” The eight national missions are at various stages of implementation by the nodal ministries and departments, but progress has been slow. The initial budget allocation for most of the missions was considered to be inadequate when it came to implementation. Earlier, a report was released by the Climate Change Finance Unit, Ministry of Finance, under the United Progressive Alliance government where they had committed to spend “large resources through its planning process on meeting the domestic mitigation goal to reducing the emission intensity of its GDP by 20-25 per cent by 2020 in comparison to 2005 level”. This hardly found mention in budget speech.

<http://www.millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=96905>

Date Accessed: 03.03. 2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

Finance Panel Gives, Budget Takes Away

(Deccan Herald, March 02, 2015)

The Centre may have given a bounty to states by the way of 14th Finance Commission awards but the fine print in the Budget suggests that the states woes are still far from over. The Budget has been very harsh towards two particular schemes – Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) and Rashtriya Krishi Bima Yojana (RKVY). In a dissent note, Abhijit Sen, a member of 14th Finance Commission, has asked the Centre to be a bit kind. While, the Budget has already wound up one scheme, the grant has been pruned to half in the other.

Some states, and specially some backward districts, could be hit if the Backward Regional Grant Fund is wound up as part of pruning plan transfers consequent to our award,” Sen had written in the dissent note in the Finance Commission report, which was made public last week. Similarly, he had said that the country will be “ill served” if RKVY is pruned excessively. His worst fears have come true in the Budget which has pruned RKVY by close to half from Rs 8,444 crore in the revised estimates of last year to Rs 4,500 crore this year. The other scheme (BRGF) for backward states has been wound up completely. Some completely wound up schemes include a scheme for strengthening of panchayats, a scheme for the modernisation of police forces, and the National e-Governance Plan.

The Finance Bill 2015 does not say in as many words that the scheme has been wound up but indicates that the states will have to take care of such schemes by themselves for which there is no allocation from the Centre. The Budget which claims to have implemented the 14th Finance Commission awards in letter and spirit, has overlooked another of the commission’s recommendation which spoke against special grants to states. Election-bound Bihar and West Bengal have liberally been given special grants.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/462889/finance-panel-gives-budget-takes.html>

Date Accessed:03.03.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

Budget 2015: Draconian Black Money Law Won't Work Without One-Time Amnesty

(R Jaganath, Firstpost, March 02, 2015)

Finance Minister announced and proposed three important aspects to deal with the menace of Black Money. These are one is to deter black money generation by disincentivising cash transactions; the second is to improve the government's ability to track potential black money deals by monitoring and sharing information with the investigative agencies; the third is about changing laws to increase punishments for holding undeclared black money abroad or at home. All three are needed, but are essentially draconian in nature. They will enable the taxman and the investigating agencies to wield enormous power against citizens. The potential for corruption and graft will escalate, not reduce if these powers are not counter-balanced with safeguards. Draconian laws can be justified only if people are offered a chance to come clean.

It is always a good idea for the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) to share data; presumably, the data will also be shared with the Enforcement Directorate which

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looks at the foreign money laundering angle. One also presumes that the reference to “splitting or reportable transactions” includes domestic real estate, which is where this happens often in order to avoid higher stamp duties. Once again, without safeguards built into the law, citizen data will be in the hands of tax sleuths who could misuse the information for various reasons. Also, the mere access to data should not be a license to launch fishing expeditions against all and sundry. The law clearly needs to draw a balance between the need to prevent black money generation and the citizen’s right to non-intrusive surveillance and privacy.

There is nothing wrong in prosecuting abettors and the primary crooks involved. But when the law is made so stringent, it is important also for the government to make it prospective – and give those who concealed income and assets abroad or in India a last chance to come clean. This won’t happen without a formal amnesty scheme that protects identities even while earning back-taxes.

<http://www.firstpost.com/budget/budget-2015-draconian-black-money-law-wont-work-without-one-time-amnesty-2129455.html>

Date Accessed:03.03.2015
(Devyani Bhushan)

India Sets Inflation Target in Monetary Policy Overhaul

(Rafael Nam & Manoj Kumar, *Reuters*, March 02, 2015)

In a document dated February 20, 2015, the government and the central bank agreed to set a consumer inflation target of 4%, with a band of plus or minus 2 percentage points, from the financial year ending in March 2017. Raghuram Rajan, has championed this move to inflation targeting, which is increasingly prevalent in emerging market economies which typically struggle to contain price rises that hurt the citizens.

Given that India’s inflation problems cannot be fixed by monetary policy alone, this move is likely to be significant. Due to India’s dependence on energy imports, the impact of erratic monsoons on the farm sector and the difficulties in transporting food items because of poor roads and infrastructure, India has seen chronic price volatility.

"This framework will decrease the uncertainty around the decision-making process and there will be limited possibility of any speculation," Rupa Rege Nitsure, group chief economist at L&T Financial Services, said. "Transparency and predictability in monetary policy decisions are significant progress." The government will now need to amend the RBI Act to reflect a new mandate for the central bank, ushering in the biggest overhaul of monetary policy since the big bang reforms of 1991 that saw India open its

up economy to foreign investors. Any amendments will need to be approved by parliament, which finance ministry officials have said will come within months.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2015/03/02/india-rbi-idINKBN0LY0B320150302>

Date accessed: 4.3.2015
(Kasturi Mishra)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENT

No Roadmap for Smart Cities, Housing for All in Union Budget 2015-16

(Sachin Sandhir, *Business Today*, March 02, 2015)

The Union Budget 2015-16 focused heavily on boosting infrastructure investment; however it failed to give any announcements or roadmap to help build smart cities and housing for all, as promised earlier. The Budget gives no attention to the real estate sector's demand for an 'industry status.'

The real estate is facing a cash crunch and the industry status could have eased the flow of bank loans towards the sector; however such an emphasis was missing in the Budget. Besides, there was no clear roadmap for the 'housing for all by 2022.' The government proposes to build two crore dwelling units in rural areas and four crore in urban settlements. For this reason, a little clarity on the outlay for undertaking this construction activity of a huge scale should have also been included in the Budget speech. This was conspicuously missing.

A follow-up on the last year's Budget announcement on smart cities should have been made in this Budget as well. "A clear roadmap on the development of proposed 100 smart cities, which was keenly awaited by industry, has not found any mention in the Budget."

<http://businesstoday.intoday.in/story/jaitley-disappoints-with-no-roadmap-for-smart-cities-in-budget/1/216377.html>

Date accessed: 4.3.2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

GOVERNMENT

Maintenance of National Highways Remains Neglected

(Deepak K Dash, *Times of India*, March 02, 2015)

Substantial increase in budgetary allocation and the provision to raise more funds from the market for building and expanding highways may accelerate road construction, but maintenance of large sections of national highways still remains a challenge for the road ministry. Only Rs 2,700 crore has been earmarked for this purpose during 2015-16, which is about half of what the agencies require. It has been a practice to provide only up to 40-50% of the fund required for maintaining existing assets while the focus is more on capital investment. Every successive government has been adding more kilometres under NH network, which were earlier state highways. While this is seen as an achievement,

as soon as such stretches are notified as NHs, state governments stop spending anything for their maintenance. And little funds are left to look after the entire NH network.

In fact, the most common commuter complaint is of poor upkeep of highways. This problem is acute on stretches that are not brought under the government's flagship National Highways Development Project (NHDP). Out of the total 96,200 km of NHs in the country, only about 54,500 km are under NHDP. Maintenance of the remaining stretches is met from this meagre fund. Poor and delayed maintenance cause major damage. So, adequate funds are required for good work and that should happen in time.

There are also issues of state government agencies not taking adequate steps to maintain NHs for which they get funds from the central government. The Centre cannot escape blame for this since NHs are owned by the central government.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Maintenance-of-national-highways-remains-neglected/articleshow/46425612.cms>

Date Accessed: 03.03.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EXCLUSION

Government's Bid to Dilute Tribal Rights to Help Industry

(Nitin Sethi, *Business Standard*, March 03, 2015)

As per a new notification prepared by the Environment Ministry, industries will be allowed to chop down traditional forests without permission of the gram sabhas, a condition that currently exists in the forest rights act. A approval from the Prime Minister's Office, implies that the government need seek Parliament approval for the same.

The draft notes that "projects that come up in tribal forestlands situated outside Schedule V and VI areas and are required to hold a public hearing for an environment clearance under the Environment Protection Act, 1986 need not seek tribal gram sabhas' consent." Notification even goes on to make exceptions for linear projects such as oil pipelines, roads, railways and powerlines.

Schedule V and VI are areas where there is large tribal population but do not cover large forest tracts. Most large size projects are required to hold public meeting, which are consultative in nature and cannot veto the project.

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Gram Sabhas and village councils are the primary democratic bodies. However, even in scheduled areas with high tribal population, role of gram sabhas has been diluted as authority to give consent has been given to local bodies and authorities. Moreover, the notification also allows states to ascertain whether consent has been taken or not. This reduces the responsibility of Union government to ensure that rights of tribals have been adhered to before giving the forest clearances.

The tribal ministry is yet to comment on the notification, however, as per reports most of its objections have been overruled.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/govt-s-bid-to-dilute-tribal-rights-to-help-industry-115030300002_1.html

Date Accessed: 5.3.2015
(Shriyam Gupta)

EDUCATION

Onus on States to Continue Scheme for Model Schools

(Prashant K. Nanda, *Livemint*, March 03, 2015)

A six-year old plan to build 6,000 model schools as benchmarks of excellence has lost support, owing to the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission. These schools were supposed to be modelled on the Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry-controlled Kendriya Vidyalaya, or central schools. Out of the 6,000, the first group of 3,500 were to be built jointly by central and state governments in educationally backward blocks. The HRD ministry had already sanctioned funds for at least 947 of these schools. The second category of 2,500 schools was planned for the richer blocks, planned on partnering private firms.

However, owing to the finance commission's recommendation to increase the share of taxes transferred to the states, the school scheme is left to die, as several central schemes have been cut. The states have been given the freedom to either pursue the scheme on their own or wind it up. Cutting the financial lifeline implies that the expected private investments would not materialise and the lack of funds will continue to plague the education sector.

While some progressive states might continue the scheme, all might not. Under the right to education law that mandates compulsory schooling, at least 25% of a school's students can belong to underprivileged families and are entitled to free education. The government would pay for their

schooling. With this in place, the centre missed the opportunity to promote private investment in higher education.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/Mvkfj6lc4S2gfoa8bc28HI/Model-schools-centre-opts-out-onus-on-states.html>

Date accessed: 4.3.2015
(Kasturi Mishra)

HEALTH

186 Abortions Occur Daily in Maharashtra

(Swati Jha, *Asian Age*, March 02, 2015)

Some 91,231 women have undergone medical termination of pregnancy in the state in the last four years while there have been 1,036 maternal deaths. A latest RTI report procured from the public health department of the state says that on an average 186 women are undergoing the procedure daily. The high abortion rates show lack of awareness of family planning measures and the prevalence of daughter aversion in the state, according to non-government organisations working in the area. Highlighting the reasons for the high number of abortion deaths, doctors said unchecked use of medical termination pills, post-abortion complications, frequent abortions and aborting a child after 20 weeks which is illegal were leading to complications and death.

The year 2013-14 saw the highest number of abortions in which there were 30,117 cases while a total of 276 died during the procedure. Experts also pointed out that there was a lack of awareness on family planning measures among the common public. Then there are factors such as social stigma and embarrassment related to demanding contraception, which the government still has not been able to address. However, Archana Patil, additional director of the public health department, added that though the figures were significant, abortions were not always due to lack of awareness. "There are many cases in which abortion is necessary as there is a threat to the mother's health or the child has been detected with an anomaly. A huge number of women are conceiving due to failure of contraceptives. Abortions are also performed in case of pregnancies owing to rape, which is adding to the numbers."

Abortion after seven weeks cannot be done without a specialised gynaecologist. It is done through suction evacuation before 12 weeks and through surgical procedure after three months, but only after careful examinations. The help of registered gynaecologist at registered centres must be sought in case of abortions. Unchecked use of any kind

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of pills or surgical procedure for abortion leads to such complications that can cause death.

<http://www.asianage.com/mumbai/186-abortions-occur-daily-maharashtra-804>

Date Accessed: 03.03.2015
(Devyani Bhushan)

Panel Recommends Waiving Late-Stage Trials for Some Drugs

(*Live Mint*, March 05, 2015)

During a meeting of the Drugs Technical Advisory Board(DTAB), a panel of advisors recommended waiving late-stage trials for some drugs that are already being sold some in foreign markets. The DTAB advises the central and state governments on technical matters related to drug regulations.

As per Indian law, all medicines have to be tested in clinical trials at a late-stage before they can be granted an approval for their sale. However, in some cases, such as life threatening diseases, the requirements can be “shortened, deferred, or omitted.”

According to the 19 member panel, clinical trials for new drugs already being sold in “well regulated” countries may be waived, if the safety and efficacy of the drug is found to be “favourable”. Such a waiver would speed up the approval process for new drugs. These developments will be favourable for foreign drug makers who rue India’s strict rules and red tape around clinical trial approvals.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/lblQhw5aZz72Ue41lzzGWL/Panel-recommends-waiving-latestage-trials-for-some-drugs.html>

Date Accessed: 08.03.2015
(Afreen Faridi)

1.1 Billion People at Risk of Hearing Loss warns WHO

(*Down to Earth*, March 03, 2015)

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), at least 1.1 billion teenagers and adults are at risk of hearing loss. The reason of such risk of hearing loss is attributed to unsafe use of audio devices, exposure to damaging levels of sounds at nightclubs, bars and sporting events.

After analysing data from middle and high income countries, the WHO found that nearly 50% of teenagers and young adults were exposed to unsafe levels of sounds from

personal audio devices and 40% of them were exposed to such damaging levels of sounds at venues of entertainment.

Sounds at more than 85 decibels for eight hours or 100 decibels for 15 minutes are considered unsafe. Once hearing is lost, it cannot be regained as per Etienne Krug, WHO Director for the Department for Management of Non-Communicable Diseases, Disability, Violence and Injury Prevention.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/international-ear-care-day-11-billion-people-risk-hearing-loss-warns-who>

Date Accessed: 08.03.2015
(Afreen Faridi)

ENVIRONMENT

NGT Pulls Up Delhi Government for Lax Approach Towards Pollution

(*The Hindu*, March 02, 2015)

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) rapped the Delhi Government for not implementing its directions to curb vehicular pollution in Delhi.

A Bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar said, “Studies have shown that Delhi’s air pollution is very injurious to human health,” while asking the government of the steps it had taken in consonance with the NGT’s orders date November 26, 2014.

While hearing a petition by Vardhaman Kaushik, who claimed that “the level of particulates in Delhi is rising manifold and the reasons for which should be identified and curbed,” the NGT expressed anguish at the absence of the government’s main counsel.

The tribunal also directed the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), along with the Delhi Pollution Control Committee and the Central Pollution Control Committee to inspect old and new low-floor buses to check if they comply with the environmental norms and whether they have a valid pollution control certificate. In an earlier report, submitted by the Joint Commissioner of Transportation, it was revealed that 186 DTC buses were plying without valid pollution control certificates.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/ngt-raps-govt-over-lax-approach-to-pollution/article6950009.ece>

Date Accessed: 02.03.2015
(Afreen Faridi)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Neutrino Project will be Detrimental to Western Ghats says Medha Patkar

(Times of India, March 02, 2015)

Medha Patkar, convener of the National Alliance of People's Movements, said that the neutrino project "would have a detrimental effect on the fragile ecosystem of the Western Ghats." She added that stakeholders of the project and the government should allay public apprehensions by conducting a public debate before going on with the project.

Ms. Patkar claimed that the 2.5 km tunnel required for the project would affect the Mullai Periyar river and that the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, (author of the environmental impact report for the project), was not competent to assess the project's impact on the environment. Ms. Patkar further alleged that the site identified in Madurai, for the neutrino laboratory preliminary works, could be used to dump nuclear waste from the Kudankulam project.

Ms. Patkar said that she had received calls from academicians claiming that the neutrino project was safe. She felt that the fact that the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board had not yet given its clearance for the project was the only saving grace for the moment.

Ms. Patkar is joined by the MDMK chief, Mr. Vaiko, who is leading an anti-neutrino campaign against the project. Ms. Patkar also contended that artificial neutrinos, such as those produced in Chicago, had the power to destroy even nuclear weapons.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/Neutrino-project-will-be-detrimental-to-Western-ghats-Patkar/articleshow/46426109.cms>

Date Accessed: 02.03.2015

(Afreen Faridi)

AGRICULTURE

Union Budget 2015-16 Focuses on Benefitting Agribusiness; not Augmenting Farm Incomes

(Devinder Sharma, India Together, February 28, 2015)

While the Budget speech mentioned raising agriculture incomes as a challenging task before the Government and therefore some focus was expected on a mechanisms to pull farmers from the economic distress in the farming distress. However, the farmers have been disappointed by the Minister's inability to see the farmers' plight. Agricultural

production has dropped because of a shortfall in monsoon and the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) 2014 has estimated the average monthly farm family income (that a household drives from farming alone) at a paltry Rs 3,078 and thus, the need for a bailout package for farmers was grave.

However, except for raising the farm loan limit from Rs 8 lakh crore (announced in the 2014 budget) to Rs 8.5 lakh crore this year, and promising to create a national agriculture market, there is nothing to bring relief for the farming community. Here too, it needs to be seen that the Rs 8.5-lakh crore farm credit actually does not benefit farmers as much as it benefits the agribusiness industry. Almost 94% of the farm credit, available at a subvention interest rate of 4%, goes to the agribusiness industry dealing in seeds, pesticides, and farm machinery. It should, therefore, be called agribusiness credit and not farm credit. The national agricultural market is aimed at taking farmers out of the preview of the APMC Act, which will render the APMC 'mandis' redundant thereby leaving farmers at the mercy of private traders. In any case, only 8% farmers get the benefit of procurement prices, leaving 92% farmers to depend on the markets. Thus, if a focus on markets was to benefit the scenario, the farm economy would already have looked better.

It would have been helpful had a nationwide programme to create a network of mandis been proposed. An extension of the provision of procurement prices to all states would have gone a long way to provide security to the farmers, but this is absent. There is a need to understand that it is not the lack of improved technology or access to markets that is pushing farming into crisis. It is actually the declining farm income over the years responsible for this condition and adequate attention needs to be given to agrarian distress, instead of only focusing on the growth rate in agriculture.

<http://indiatogether.org/articles/union-budget-2015-arun-jaitley-provisions-for-agriculture-and-farmers-economy>

Date accessed: 4.3.2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

Government's Potato Pittance for Farmers

(The Telegraph, March 5, 2015)

The Bengal government has decided to buy 50,000 tonnes of potato and allow export of 2 lakh tonnes after the price dipped to INR 4 per kg due to lack of buyers. The government claims that the bumper harvest has led to a decline in prices that is why buying potato from farmers and allowing export will bring relief. However, senior official

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say that this is a ‘desperate attempt’ to cover up government’s mismanagement.

Officials pointed out that the amount to be procured and export limit is very low as the production in Bengal has reached 1.2 crore tonnes. Farmers lack financial capacity to store the potatoes and are being forced to sell the produce at INR four per kg. “Although the government is trying to project the bumper production as the reason for the farmers’ woes, officials said the problem was rooted in the administration’s decision to disallow traders from selling potato to other states citing an abnormal rise in prices over the past two years.”

The state has always produced around 1.2 crore tonnes, thus, bumper production cannot be a reason for traders losing interest. Potato traders noted that they did not buy the produce, as the government may not allow them to export it. The state consumption is 60 lakh tonnes but the government has allowed export of only two lakh tonnes. As per officials, the initiative will not help farmers at all.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150305/jsp/siliguri/story_6980.jsp#.VPfvBktIpE

Date Accessed: 5.3.2015

(Shriyam Gupta)

Farmers’ Suicide Cases Rise 26% to 1,109 in 2014

(*The Indian Express*, March 04, 2015)

The number of farmer suicides in India has gone by 26% in 2014. Minister of State for Agriculture noted that about 1,109 farmers committed suicide in 2014 due to agrarian reasons. “Out of 1,109 cases, 986 were reported from Maharashtra, 84 from Telangana and 29 from Jharkhand.” 879 farmers committed suicide in 2013 while 1,046 farmers did so in 2012.

There are various reasons for farmer suicide. As per reasons reported by state governments these include “crop failure, indebtedness, drought, socio-economic and personal reasons” The Minister further noted that Agriculture is a state subject and state governments need to take actions to develop the agricultural sector.

In another statement the Minister also highlighted that the number of agricultural workers in the country has gone up by 12.38 per cent to 263.1 million in 2011. Given such a situation he pointed out that “Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has been strengthened and re-structured to prioritize research and development programs for various crops such as rice, wheat, maize, millets, fodder crops,

oilseeds, pulses, sugarcane, cotton, fiber etc”.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/farmers-suicide-cases-rise-26-percent-to-1109-in-2014/>

Date Accessed: 5.3.2015

(Shriyam Gupta)

INDIA AND WORLD

AFRICA

Nigerian Refugee Crisis Continues as Boko Haram Fighting Spills Across Region

(United Nations News Centre, March 03, 2015)

The United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) reported that more than 16,000 refugees have fled Nigeria into Cameroon due to increasing violence of Boko Haram. Increasing instance of violence between Nigerian forces and Boko Haram has caused the insurgent group to increase attacks on Niger, civilians of Chad and Cameroon. Refugee influx to Cameroon is taking place via 'extremely volatile' regions of Makaria, Logone Birni and Fotokol, which leaves the refugees vulnerable to Boko Haram.

About 2,000 refugees are being transferred to the Minawao where a refugee camp is already sheltering 32,600 refugees. Due to increased incidents of violence it is becoming increasing difficult to provide aid to the people. Further, a new camp is now needed more far away from the border areas to ensure safety and availability of water.

Currently, over 66,000 Nigerian are seeking shelter in Cameroon. Moreover, 18,000 have moved to Chad after 15,000 have already done post Boko Haram's offensive against the town of Baga in Nigeria's Borno state in January. "Meanwhile, more than 100,000 people have already found refuge in Niger despite a steadily deteriorating humanitarian situation and a spike in insurgent attacks again." The refugee crisis is making Nigeria food insecure. In November 2014, as per World Food Programme (WFP) "a total of 52.7 per cent of displaced households and their host families were severely – 14 per cent – or moderately – 38.7 per cent – food insecure, and in need of food assistance."

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50217#.VPX93LOUfnI>

Date Accessed: 3.3.2015
(Shriyam Gupta)

UNICEF Fears Scores of Kidnapped Children in South Sudan Could be Sent to Front Lines

(United Nations News Centre, March 02, 2015)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has expressed deep concerns over kidnapped children being sent to frontlines to fight. In a recent release the organization noted that 89 children were forcibly recruited to serve as child soldiers, but now they fear that the numbers could be much worse. It is assumed, Shilluk Militia under the control of Johnson Oloni is behind the kidnapping. "This militia is aligned with the Government's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces."

As per reports, children as young as 12 years have been seen in training camps carrying guns. UNICEF's Representative in South Sudan, Jonathan Veitch, has urged military leaders to let the children go. He has also asked the Government of South Sudan to take relevant steps to secure the safety of the children. One of the challenges in collecting reliable data is the high presence of militia in sensitive areas.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50225#.VPXyv0tIpE>

Date Accessed: 3.3.2015
(Shriyam Gupta)

OPINION/BOOKS

OPINIONS

We are Killing Our Urban Residents through the Air they Breathe

(Economic and Political Weekly, February 28, 2015)

Thirteen of the twenty most polluted cities in the world are in India. The pollution in India has been growing at a rate of 300% for the last 15 years. Though pollution affects everyone, its impact on the poor is higher as the rich 'shelter' themselves from it by using air filters and purifiers. Maybe that is why environmental pollution does not get the attention it deserves.

Contents of air pollution include sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. SPM or Suspended Particular Matter is even more harmful with regards to human health. SPM has two components: PM10 (SPM that is 10 micrometres) and the finer and more dangerous PM2.5 (SPM that is 2.5 micrometres). World Health Organization's (WHO) estimated in 2012 that about 3.7 million people under the age of 60 died due to outdoor pollution. It has also been identified as the 6th most dangerous killer in South Asia. WHO's permissible levels for PM10 and PM2.5 are 20 µg/m³ and 10 µg/m³ respectively. No Indian city passes these standards. Even with the diluted standards of India's National Ambient Air Quality (NAAQ) standards (60 µg/m³ for PM10 and 40 µg/m³ for PM2.5) most Indian cities fail the test.

Rise in pollution can be attributed to a number of reasons. Foremost among them is burning of fossil fuels. In cities privatized transport is the primary cause. Inefficient public transport adds to increased use of private transport. Besides that continuous use of biomass adds to the SPM levels. Delhi, for example is one of the most polluted cities for several reasons. One reason is the presence of hinterland, where farmers burn husk during certain times of the year. Apart this, other factors which contribute to pollution are these use of diesel generators for power generation and chimneys of coal plants nearby Delhi.

Cities like Beijing have shown that change is possible. There is a need to urgently address the issue through prioritizing public transports, reducing curbing use of private cars and making clean fuel available across the city.

<http://www.epw.in/editorials/haze-and-smoke.html>

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