

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

India has undergone some tectonic shifts at policy level within almost a year with the change in government in May 2014. It is now almost clear that the country is moving ahead with the agenda of economic growth but not substantially with social justice. This very fundamental ideological shift has been reflected with the first major announcement by the Prime Minister Mr. Modi on 15th August 2014 to dismantle India's most robust and well tested institution, the Planning Commission. Planning Commission was the brain child of many Indian visionaries and was borne immediately after India's Independence in 15th March 1950 by the Resolution of Government of India to improve the quality of life of the distressed masses by reallocating country's resources through planned intervention. Abiding by the Constitution of India, which guarantees certain Fundamental Rights to the citizens of India, the Planning Commission aimed at the welfare of the people in every sphere of national life. It also enunciates certain Directive Principles of State Policy to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as possible a social order.

The long 65 years journey of the Planning Commission has certainly made many significant contributions and has attempted to create a better India, where people of the lowest stratum and region of the remotest corner were paid attention at policy level and with massive financial support. Thus planned investments through various modes and schemes over time have been directed to address the issues of vulnerable groups and have tried to reduce the startling development-differentials of advanced and backward as well as bordering regions of India. This planning era was almost indispensable for building Indian nation. The goal is yet to reach as this vast nation still has the basic problem of hunger, malnutrition, health, road, sanitation and education. Government intervention through planning process therefore still remains very important. But the sudden shift in the strategy by the new government without enough debates, consultation and voices, both at policy and academic levels has brought in lot of apprehensions and worries.

NITI Aayog, the newly formed 'think tank' to government aims to provide policy direction to the government, and has two broad agendas like, increasing private economic activities through more coercive liberalization policy and greater decentralization of political power through co-operative federalism. Unlike Planning Commission, it has not yet formulated any vision for resource distribution to reduce the widening economic gaps and inequalities and to enhance balanced socio-economic order. One can possibly say that India's development discourse may no longer be inclusive, as the basic economic philosophy of welfarism is at peril, and planning as its instrument to deal with it is no longer in existence. The states with greater political power now are expected to prioritize their social agenda for better and balanced outcomes.

Our cover story makes critical analyses of NITI Aayog, and focuses on the relevant role of Planning in nation building.

Hope our readers will find it useful.

*Rakhee Bhattacharya
Associate Director, RGICS*

IN THIS ISSUE

COVER STORY:

- NITI Aayog

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK:

- Government Plans to Amend Anti-dowry Harassment Law
- IMA Opposes Health Ministry's Proposal Allowing AYUSH and Paramedical Staff to Terminate Pregnancies
- Literacy Rates of Scheduled Tribes Far Below National Average, Says Parliamentary Panel

SECTION 1: THE ECONOMY

- Fewer Jobs as Delhi 'Neglects' Rural Scheme
- Regular Wage Employment Major Income Source for Urban ST Households
- Project Monitoring Group Clears 208 Infra Projects Worth Rs 7.46 Lakh Cr

SECTION 2 : GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

- **Politics and Governance:** Destruction of NREGA: Bihar in focus; Bihar Slashes Spending on Education and Social Welfare
- **Government:** BJP to Push for Stronger Anti-Cattle Laws; Nationalization of Waterways Opposed; BJP Acts to End Beef

Shortage in Goa: Starts Importing Meat from Maharashtra, Karnataka

- **Education:** RSS Seeks Education in Mother Tongue or State Languages
- **Energy:** Mumbai's Waste Disposal Problem; Green India Mission and MGNREGA Merged;
- **Agriculture:** Power in Indian Farming Undergoes Substantial Change

SECTION 3: SOCIETY

- **Gender:** SEBI Asks Companies to Appoint More Women on Boards by March-end Or Face Regulatory Action

SECTION 4: INDIA AND THE WORLD

- **India in the World:** Prime Minister's Approach to the Indian Ocean Region Lacks Clarity;
- **International Affairs:** UN Agency Begins Relocation of 50,000 Flood-Affected Refugees in Ethiopia; New UN Report Highlights 'Terrifying' Impact of Ebola on Nine Million Children; Middle Income Nations Home to Half the World's Hungry

SECTION 5: OPINIONS/BOOKS

- **Opinions:** By Scaling Down the Number of Rape Crisis Centres, the Government Stands Exposed

COVER STORY

NITI Aayog

Context

Since the BJP-led NDA government came to power in 2014, it has actively pursued the cause of a free-market economy, starting with labour reforms, dilution of land acquisition safeguards, coal deregulation and insurance reforms. All these moves correspond to providing a better climate for the corporate investment. In this regard, the Vice-Chairman of the NITI Aayog and advisor to the BJP-led NDA government Arvind Panagariya, stated that India is now a market economy and there is no place for planning in it (India Today, 2014). Against this backdrop, on January 1st, 2015, the government replaced Planning Commission with a new institution called NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India). The idea behind dismantling the Planning Commission was to align the policy making process with the economic philosophy of the current government, which dismisses central planning and welfarism. (The Huffington Post, 2015)

Jawaharlal Nehru was deeply attached to the concept of planning as a process for solving India's grave economic problems of unemployment, mass poverty, food shortage and the advancement of productivity. (Nehru's Vision to Empower Indian Economy, 2011) The Commission was set up by Nehru in the year 1950 with the explicit objective to promote a rapid rise in the standard of living of the people by efficient exploitation of the resources of the country, increasing production and offering opportunities to all for employment in the service of the community. It was charged with the responsibility of making assessment of all resources of the country, augmenting deficient resources, formulating plans for the most effective and balanced utilisation of resources and determining priorities. (Rediff, 2014) During initial years after Independence, Planning Commission provided a plan frame, to allocate the low levels of savings to invest in infrastructure and priority sectors to overcome severe infrastructure deficits and the lack of competitiveness of the economy. Over the years, the Planning Commission worked towards the fulfilment of social commitments which included objectives such as adequate living standards, the assurance of social justice, opportunities for cultural development and the re-adjustment of human relations to promote social harmony. The Commission pursued a comprehensive social welfare programme including social legislation, welfare of women and children, family and youth welfare that it extended to the states through Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS).

However, post the liberalization reforms, this planning exercise was perceived to be obstructive. Fiscal constraints became more and more binding and political economy factors crowded out infrastructure spending with subsidies and transfers. The centralized command over resource allocation and the developmental role of the states in a federal polity was seen as a concern to many. The Planning Commission was thus criticized for causing distortions in public spending through centrally-sponsored schemes with "one size fits all" design.

Economic liberalization has already created a thriving private sector and now the NITI Aayog is supposed to assist in policymaking to augment and enable these private entrepreneurs to realize their maximum potential. NITI Aayog, additionally, calls for greater de-centralization of power and strengthening of the federal structure. The NITI would supposedly act as 'Think Tank' of the Government - a directional and policy dynamo. The cabinet resolution lists 13 different tasks to it which may be grouped under four major heads, namely:

1. Fostering cooperative federalism by providing structured support to states on a continuous basis;
2. Formulation of a strategic vision and long-term policies and programme framework both for the macro-economy and for different sectors
3. Acting as a knowledge and innovation hub and providing research inputs by undertaking and accessing globally available research and
4. Providing a platform for interdepartmental coordination. (PIB, 2015) NITI Aayog aims to emphasis on market economy as opposed to a planned one.

This cover story aims to bring out the crux of this major policy shift and highlights the indispensable role of the erstwhile Planning Commission in India's pursuit for inclusive growth and relevance. The story also touches upon the possible concentration of power entailed in the creation of the NITI Aayog; along with the shift in the state's ideology from a state that promotes welfarism to one that primarily aids the cause of profit-making.

COVER STORY

Relevance of Planning Commission

Planning in India is a crucial process as one-third of the population still lives in poverty and there is enormous income inequality. Planning Commission is thus an extremely relevant institution in India as it is well equipped in dealing with national objectives of poverty alleviation, population control, employment generation and balanced regional development in a holistic manner.

- **It is improper to see the Planning Commission as a relic of the “Soviet era”.** Planning Commission was a necessary legacy of the anti-colonial struggle. “Planning” came into effect not just in India but in a range of countries that were newly liberated from colonialism. Planning aimed to bring the country’s natural resources back under national control and the production pattern was to be altered from what had been dictated by the colonial division of labour. The benefits of all these measures were to accrue to the people at large by ensuring that wealth and income inequalities were kept in check. (EPW, 2015).
- **The role of planning itself is highly relevant in determining the long-term path of the country and its economy.** There is a need for establishing broad quantitative medium term targets for the economy in terms of growth, the sectoral composition of growth, growth of individual states, the likely impact on employment and poverty reduction, and also some key “inclusiveness targets” which can be quantified. These targets cannot be set independently by the Ministries. While the Finance Ministry is the right place for setting short term targets based on short term macroeconomic models, the Planning commission is a better fit to do detailed analysis of specific sectors.
- **There is also a need for planning in market economy.** Market enthusiasts need to be reminded that even in a market economy there are several aspects that need to be “planned” either because they involve cooperation of different layers of government, or because there are cross cutting issues involving different sectors. Examples of such issues are the development of the transport network comprising roads, railways, ports, airports, and inland water ways which must be planned together in a holistic manner so that they can be mutually supportive. Any policies for the management of the energy economy, dealing with different forms of energy, under different Ministries, must take a holistic view. (A New Planning Institution: Some Suggestions, 2015) The key to efficient utilization of resources lies in the creation of appropriate self-managed organizations at all levels. (Rediff, 2004)
- **The Commission concentrated on maximizing output by using limited resources.** Instead of looking for mere increase in plan outlays, the effort was to look for an increase in the efficiency of utilization of the allocations being made. Over the years, the Planning Commission has been instrumental in ensuring social equality, promotion of decentralised planning, and in the monitoring of human development; especially that of the socially and economically backward segments in the country's population.
- **Resolving inter-ministerial problems.** While some problems were handled by the Cabinet Secretariat or the PMO, other problems reflecting deeper concerns required substantial modification of the policy were handled by the Planning Commission. NITI Aayog, as merely a think tank might fail to perform this role. (A New Planning Institution: Some Suggestions, 2015)
- **Abolition of planning will remove one of the main instruments of state for proactive and strategic intervention for social transformation and upliftment through central planning. It will roll back the economic and social role of the Union from social engineering to laissez faire.** Thus, while the creation of the Aayog and a focus on market economy may be beneficial to big industrial states like Gujarat and Maharashtra, small and backward states like Assam, which need a focus on welfare schemes, would suffer as a consequence.

NITI Aayog: What it entails

While NITI Aayog claims to decentralise, it is expected to oversee a greater centralisation of powers. With the abolition of the National Development Council and its replacement by regional councils, the limited say the states had on policies and the flow of funds are likely to be further eroded. (EPW, 2015)

COVER STORY

Rise of neo-liberalism

The abolition of the Planning Commission needs to be seen as the Indian state consciously distancing itself from welfare approach and embracing international capital with which the domestic corporate-financial oligarchy is closely integrated. In the absence of the Planning Commission, the Ministry of Finance is elevated to a dominating status above all other official organs and is in turn filled by employees of the World Bank, the IMF and other institutions of finance capital, who are thereby basically put in charge of the economy; making India join several other third world countries where global financial bureaucrats get entrusted with the task of running the economy. Establishment of NITI Aayog thus reflects a transition from a state professing anti-imperialism to a neo-liberal state.

Overarching Role of the Ministry of Finance

There used to be three main channels through which funds get devolved from the centre to the states: through the Finance Commission, through the Planning Commission and through discretionary transfers. Barring the Finance Commission which is a constitutional body, the other two channels respond to the discretion of the central government. Even in the case of the Finance Commission, the Centre appoints its members and ultimately fixes its terms of reference and therefore, the Central writ prevails. The disappearance of the Planning Commission would mean that what used to be plan transfers would now be doled out through the Finance Ministry. This might possibly entail both a possible reduction in the total magnitude of transfers, and a definite increase in the Centre's control over states' plans. (EPW, 2015)

Scrapping of the Planning Commission will see an inevitable strengthening of the Ministry of Finance, which is a far more closely controlled departmental body of the Central government than the Planning Commission ever was, and the Centre can now more effectively determine what flows to which state. States would be at the mercy of the Centre and would be dealt with arbitrarily without any common principles and norms. This dangerously opens new doors for political bargaining and deal making. (CPIM, 2015) The state governments will also likely to be burdened with the pet projects of the Prime Minister as the PM's schemes would get the top priority in NITI Aayog's agenda. These projects may not be best suited for the upliftment of weaker sections of the society. (Firstpost, 2015)

Planning is a powerful instrument of redistribution. The Planning Commission had the power to allocate funds to the ministries and state governments and through this process of redistribution it tried to promote the social sectors and reduce inequality. Establishment of NITI Aayog might distort the process of redistribution, leaving a large section of society more vulnerable since there is a lack of clarity on how CSSs will now be carried out.

Limiting the Power of the States

The National Development Council (NDC) has been abolished. The NDC, where the states' Chief Ministers were represented, was not a constitutional body and did not vote but it had a commanding presence. The states, fortified by each other made a definite impact. Its decisions included the ultimate approval of plans and since, they were taken through a consensus, the Centre was often forced to yield on certain matters. The elimination of the NDC is a major blow to the power of the states. The Governing Council where chief ministers are to be represented is likely to be a purely formal body concerned with the "governance" of the NITI Aayog, rather than with basic development issues. The meetings of the regional councils are likely to be occasions where the states supplicate to the centre for this or that favour, rather than serious challenges to central schemes and programmes. There will be only a few regional councils where the Prime Minister will sit with the state Chief Ministers. This would imply a downgrading of the voice of the states in matters concerning national economic development. The think tank will be under the Prime Minister and the PMO. This would result in a centralised Unitarian structure (CPIM, 2015).

Centralization of Power

It is claimed that the states have the opportunity to tie up with capitalists, both domestic and foreign, to work out investment projects and therefore this move entails decentralisation. However, this is precisely where the Central control over states has increased. The Centre is forcing states to go in for public-private partnerships, and forcing states to vie with one another to attract private capital to their territories. There is a clear centralisation of economic powers as the Centre is imposing the neo-liberal model on all states by ensuring that resources available to each state are spent on a plan in keeping with what the Centre considers

COVER STORY

“development” rather than on a plan of the state government’s own choice. States will not be allowed to go their own ways, not even to the extent that the Planning Commission era had allowed. (EPW, 2015)

The Planning Commission played a significant part in India’s endeavor to achieve economic freedom through taking control over its national resources from multinational oligarchs. This is being jettisoned. Additionally, the main criticism regarding the Planning Commission that it failed to uphold the federal nature of the polity, will only be magnified under NITI Aayog, given the overarching role of the Ministry of Finance. The move to provide a greater elbow room to the corporate oligarchy completely disregards the long-term interests of the states, and furthers concentration of economic power through political authoritarianism.

Conclusion

Through rolling back of state intervention and by putting in a framework that places substantial emphasis on the market, the Government is projecting an image that the distribution of economic power would be fairer and more scattered with states playing a greater role. However, this claim lacks credibility as this move completely alters the nature of the State, bringing in neo-liberalism which effectively removes the State’s role to promote economic democracy. Instead, it seeks to promote the interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy and substantially curtails the states’ economic powers. It would most likely give impetus to a highly centralized state, giving economic and political authoritarianism complete legitimacy.

The abolition of the Planning Commission might effectively put the public resources at the disposal of the private sector and market forces, eroding economic democracy, without which political democracy is of little relevance. With the NITI Aayog, the existing role of the State in ensuring the citizens the fundamental rights and fulfilling the Directive Principles of the Constitution regarding education, health, food security, and livelihood might thus be severely diluted.

Prepared by:

Kasturi Mishra & Devyani Bhushan

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HEADLINES

Government Plans to Amend Anti-dowry Harassment Law

(*Indianexpress*, March 15, 2015)

Plans are underway to amend a criminal law that will allow compromise and settlement between husband and wife at the start of trial in dowry harassment cases. "Under the proposal, Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code will be made a compoundable offence with the permission of the courts as suggested by the Law Commission and Justice Malimath Committee." A draft note for the Union Cabinet seeking to amend the relevant section of the IPC, has already been sent to the Law Ministry to begin the process of making a draft bill. Currently, the offences covered under the section are non-compoundable and non-bailable, which provides for the immediate arrest of the accused. As of now there is hardly any space available for conciliatory efforts. A husband or his family members are presumed to be guilty till they prove their innocence in the court. The guilty are punishable and could face jail terms of up to three years. This development comes after allegations that in many cases husbands and their relatives are often charged with false dowry harassment cases by their wives or her family members as a result of marital problems.

Making the offence compoundable may bring the alleged misuse of the law by facilitating conciliatory proceedings and out-of-court settlement. The permission from a court condition will be a guarantee against attempts where a wife may be compelled into a compromise by her husband or in-laws. The amendment will also increase the amount of penalty from Rs 1,000 to Rs 15,000 in case a dowry harassment case is proved wrong or proved that the law has been misused. **"Another new section is expected to be inserted to allow an accused to escape jail by paying a penalty."** Opposing the move to dilute the anti-dowry provision of the law, senior Supreme Court lawyer Indira Jaising said it is a law which gives relief and protection to harassed woman and it should be continued. The Supreme Court had in a judgement in 2010 said as it stood now, the law had become a "weapon in the hands of disgruntled woman". It had observed that a serious re-look of the entire legislature was required.

The Law Commission recommended that the offence under Section 498A should be made a compoundable offence with the permission of Court. Justice Malimath Committee on Criminal Justice Reform also recommended that it should be made compoundable as well as bailable. "Last year, the Home Ministry had asked all state governments to be judicious in slapping Section 498A of IPC in matrimonial disputes. In an advisory to the states and union territories, the Ministry had asked them to instruct their police officers not

to automatically arrest a person when a case under Section 498-A of the IPC is registered but to satisfy themselves about the necessity for arrest under the parameters laid down flowing from Section 41, CrPC (When police may arrest without warrant)."

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/government-plans-to-amend-anti-dowry-harassment-law/2/>

Date Accessed: 20.03.2015

(Rohit Chauhan)

IMA Opposes Health Ministry's Proposal Allowing AYUSH and Paramedical Staff to Terminate Pregnancies

(*The Hindu*, March 16, 2015)

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) opposed the proposal by Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry to allow Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) practitioners and paramedical staff to perform abortions on pregnant women under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Bill.

The IMA opposed the view laid before the Parliament by Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda who informed the Parliament that the government was of the view that expanding the provider base with strict conditionalities would enhance access and availability of safe abortion services without compromising on quality of service. As per the Minister, requisite training and certification would be provided to the AYUSH practitioners for allowing them to perform the procedure.

The IMA expressed reservations stating that the proposals could put lives of patients at risk and allow for unethical practices including sex selective abortions. The body of allopathic doctors opposed the government's proposal of one-year course for AYUSH doctors after which they would be allowed to practice modern medicine.

As per Section 15 of the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956, "no person other than a medical practitioner enrolled on a State Medical Register shall practice medicine in any State. Any person who acts in contravention of this shall be punished with imprisonment of one year or fine of Rs.1, 000 or both." However, State governments can notify and recognize qualifications which are qualify for registration in the State Medical Register. Doctors from some states like Goa strongly voiced opposition while Rajasthan said that registering AYUSH doctors in the State Medical Register

HEADLINES

would complicate their mainstreaming.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ima-health-ministry-lock-horns/article6996649.ece>

Date Accessed: 16.03.2015

(Afreen Faridi)

Literacy Rates of Scheduled Tribes Far Below National Average, Says Parliamentary Panel

(*Firstpost*, March 15, 2015)

A parliamentary committee has observed, among other things, that literacy rates among Scheduled Tribes (STs) remain low when compared to the national average. **"The literacy rate as per Census 2011 is 73 percent but for STs is 59 percent only"**. The findings of the census cast serious doubts on the efficacy of respective government's efforts to promote education among the STs. The house panel also made observations about the female literacy rate, which it said, is again much lower than the national average.

The panel observed that overall literacy gap between various groups and STs has come down from 19.77 percent in 1961 to 14.03 percent in 2011. In its study the panel also found that when it comes to literacy of STs in north eastern states like Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, they are at par with the general population of the respective states. **"While in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and**

West Bengal, which have sizeable ST population in remote areas, the literacy gap is as high as 18 to 26 percent," the committee has noted. The panel has asked the government to direct its attention at the large disparity in literacy rates of STs in these states and promote education and development for STs on a "mission mode".

The panel also observed that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs does not have complete data about the number of Ashram Schools in States and UTs, as according to them the requisite information from some States is still awaited. Taking into consideration the substandard food and bad quality personal care products that are provided to the ST students in Ashram schools, it recommended that the, "ministry should ask all the state governments to take such complaints seriously and conduct appropriate inquiries in this regard and also ensure strict compliance of the standards laid down under the Right to Education Act (RTE)".

<http://www.firstpost.com/india/literacy-rates-scheduled-tribes-far-national-average-says-parliamentary-panel-2154745.html>

(Date Accessed: 18.03.2015)

Rohit Chauhan

ECONOMY

Macro Economic Dimension of India

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

States	Rural	Urban	General
All India	5.85	5.28	5.41
Northern Region			
Jammu & Kashmir	8.05	5.12	6.74
Himachal Pradesh	10.67	4.91	9.02
Punjab	10.47	7.12	8.87
Chandigarh	12.04	2.60	3.87
Uttarakhand	5.36	5.23	4.99
Haryana	7.85	6.58	6.94
Delhi	8.54	4.74	5.67
Uttar Pradesh	4.78	4.94	4.49
Western Region			
Rajasthan	7.20	6.76	6.76
Gujarat	3.68	5.44	4.69
Maharashtra	7.94	5.62	6.55
Goa	8.72	8.12	7.76
Lakshadweep	17.13	4.91	12.03
Daman & Die	12.73	12.16	12.53
Dadra Nagar & Haveli	16.56	8.19	
Central Region			5.40
Madhya Pradesh	4.16	7.57	6.08
Chattishgarh	7.70	4.73	
Southern Region			
Andhra Pradesh	7.57	5.00	6.38
Karnakata	6.49	4.65	5.53
Kerala	7.47	3.54	5.90
Tamil Nadu	5.49	4.45	5.09
Puducherry	6.92	4.67	5.63
Andaman & Nicobar Island	16.76	3.05	9.64
Northeastern Region			
Arunachal Pradesh	4.42	-	-
Assam	3.25	4.18	2.89
Manipur	18.94	8.23	14.77
Meghalaya	1.75	9.74	2.43
Mizoram	7.69	3.10	4.57
Nagaland	14.54	6.68	11.05
Tripura	13.09	7.89	11.13
Sikkim	9.22	3.67	8.35
Eastern Region			
Bihar	6.44	6.11	5.80
Jharkhand	3.47	4.54	3.38
West Bengal	0.95	5.09	2.60
Odisha	8.85	2.75	6.75

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 (From the month February 2015 onwards the New Series would be with base 2012=100) provided by MOSPI, Government of India. The 2014 March data at state-level with base 2010 is here converted to new base 2012 with linking factors of MOSPI 1.22, 1.20 and 1.21 for rural, urban and combined respectively

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

Fewer Jobs as Delhi 'Neglects' Rural Scheme

(Basant Kumar Mohanty, *The Telegraph*, March 15, 2015)

The government data indicates that millions of people are missing out livelihood sustaining work under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). As per the data, far fewer families have accessed work under the program as compared to the financial year (FY) 2013-14.

For the FY 2014-15 (till February 17), MGNREGA had generated 135 crore person days of work. This is a significant fall from 220 crore person days of work created in 2013-14. "The number of households covered under the scheme was 48 million in 2013-14. The coverage till the middle of February this year was a little over 38 million." Such a drastic fall cannot be covered in remaining days of the FY. Even the numbers for the year 2011-12 and 2012-13 were also higher than the present FY.

Jean Dreze, economist, said that it is extremely unlikely for employment generation in this financial year to come "anywhere" near the corresponding figures last year. Harsh Mander, former National Advisory Council member, noted that the scheme has been neglected since the new government assumed power. States such as Bengal and Tripura have complained that the implementation of the act is becoming increasingly difficult, as Centre has not released adequate funds.

"The government had set aside Rs 34,000 crore for the scheme for 2014-15 but the finance ministry had cut the allocation by Rs 3,000 crore in December. The allocation for 2015-16 is Rs 34,695 crore." However, the question regarding timely payment of wages still remains. If the workers have to wait for months to get paid, they would not seek work under the act. Delay in wage payment can also explain the fall in job creation this year. Decline in number of beneficiary could also mean improving economic condition of villagers. Social activist Shekhar Singh however point out that the conditions of rural poor is not better. Due to lack of funds, panchayats are not entertaining demand for work.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150316/jsp/nation/story_8985.jsp#.VQkbZWTLdtI

Date Accessed: 18.3.2015
(Shriyam Gupta)

Regular Wage Employment Major Income Source for Urban ST Households

(*Business Standard*, March 17, 2015)

A new report, released by Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) states that 46.5% of schedule tribe (ST) households in urban areas are dependent on regular wages or salary for their major source of household income. Whereas, in rural areas only 6.3% households reported regular wage or salaried income as their major source of income.

The data for National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO)'s 68th round of employment and unemployment survey, carried out in 2011-12, revealed that 58.4 per cent of the 'others' households, essentially high caste households, were dependent on self-employment in agriculture for their major source of income. Whereas, only 13.3% of them were dependent on regular wages or salary as the main source of income, while 21% were dependent on casual wage labour.

URBAN AREA HOUSEHOLDS (%)					
	Self-employed	Regular wage/salary earning	Casual labour	Others	All
ST	19.5	46.5	18.0	16.0	100
SC	26.8	44.0	20.5	8.6	100
OBC	37.8	37.6	14.3	10.4	100
Others	36.9	44.5	5.9	12.6	100
All	35.3	41.7	11.8	11.2	100

Note: Figures may not add up because of rounding off
Source: Employment and Unemployment Situation among Social Groups in India, National Sample Survey Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

Further 52.6% of schedule caste (SC) households in rural areas are dependent on casual wage, thereby suggesting the lowest agricultural holdings of this group among all social groups. In urban areas, too, 20.5% of SC households are dependent on casual wage labour compared to other social groups.

In urban areas, the proportion of households for whom self-employment is the major source of income was highest among OBCs at 37.8%, followed by 'others' at 36.9%. Further, 41.7% of urban households are dependent on regular wage or salaried employment for their major income source, as opposed to only 9.6% in rural areas.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/regular-wage-employment-major-income-source-for-urban-st-households-115031700023_1.html

Date Accessed: 18.3.2015
(Shruti Issar)

ECONOMY

Project Monitoring Group Clears 208 Infra Projects Worth Rs 7.46 Lakh Cr

(Sudheer Pal Singh, *Business Standard*, March 20, 2015)

The project monitoring group is reviewing 548 projects that need investments of over Rs 23 lakh crore. The group has facilitated 208 projects entailing investments of Rs 7.46 lakh crore by removing hurdles like lack of fuel, green clearances and land acquisition. In October 2014, the number of projects cleared stood at 180, with Rs 6.5 lakh crore funding requirement and by March 2014, the group had cleared 147 projects entailing investments of Rs 5 lakh crore.

The major projects cleared includes:

- Rs 6,200-crore power plant by Athena Chhattisgarh
- The first phase of the dedicated freight corridor worth Rs 6,699 crore
- The Rs 12,000-crore Delhi Aerocity
- The Rs 4,000-crore Wanakbori power plant
- The Rs 4,000-crore Nellore port project
- The Rs 7,509-crore Tawang hydroelectric power plant.

The group was set up in July 2013 as a secretariat for the Cabinet Committee on Investments to free stalled investment in the infrastructure sector. The group was expected to spearhead the investment cycle but industrial output data does not support claims of a revival. The cumulative growth in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) in April-January 2014-15 over the corresponding period a year ago is 2.5%. The electricity sector, has grown by 9.3% during the period but the manufacturing sector grew at 1.7%.

“The IIP data can be misleading when analysing the effect of project clearances. When the previous government left office, the group had cleared projects worth Rs 5 lakh crore. Despite this, the investment cycle does not look robust,” said Dhananjay Sinha, head of research, Emkay Global Financial Services.

“Despite clearances, many of these projects are still on paper and developers face bottlenecks in financing and implementation. The environment is still not conducive for private developers,” said Kishor Ostwal, chairman of equity research firm CNI Research.

Though, the current government has promised a business-friendly environment, however, in the presence of the financing and regulatory issues which are plaguing the projects, there is still a long way to go for the government to realize its massive infrastructure investment plan.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/project-monitoring-group-clears-208-infra-projects-worth-rs-7-46-lakh-cr-115031901046_1.html

Date Accessed: 20.3.2015

(Shruti Issar)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE**Destruction of NREGA: Jharkhand in Focus****(Ankita Aggarwal, *India Together*, March 16, 2015)**

This article highlights the destruction of NREGA, with evidence pertaining to Jharkhand. Families in Jharkhand have benefited through increased incomes and food security accruing to farm ponds for harvesting rain water constructed under the programme aiding the families to move from traditional to improve methods of paddy cultivation. However, a labour budget of Rs 1,070 crores had been approved for Jharkhand for the year 2014-15. In July 2014, it was slashed by one third. The meagre amounts of funds that had been approved also trickled in late.

Labourers in the state suffered as districts of Jharkhand delayed the submission of audit reports, required by the central government to release funds. Even the state government is reluctant to approve an increase the size of the revolving fund which could lend to the districts to even out the shortages and delays in release of funds. Given the shortage of funds, local officials are hesitant to open new works and this shortage of employment is hitting rural areas hard, as NREGA works peak in the months of January to May, causing workers to migrate. Another reason for NREGA being unattractive to rural workers is the delay in wages. As per the official Management Information System (MIS) of the NREGA, 31% of the wages were paid with delays in this financial year. This entails a six-fold increase in proportion of delayed wage payments, compared to last year. Workers who are paid their wages with delays are entitled to compensation. However, the Ministry has exempted payment of compensation in case the delays happen due to shortage of funds.

The Ministry's rush to implement the "Electronic Fund Management System" across the country from April 2014 has contributed to wage payment delays in Jharkhand. However, with several parts of Jharkhand lacking reliable Internet connectivity even at the Block, long delays in these processes, and consequently in crediting wages in workers' accounts, are rampant. Any guidelines for to ensure payment within specified timelines are being flouted routinely. The government is unable to improve the infrastructure of post office accounts in rural areas is another reason for delays. Workers have a difficult time opening a bank account and are mistreated by bank employees. Some banks in fact have refused to open accounts for NREGA workers, leaving it to the local Pragma Kendra. In fact, workers are unable to learn about the crediting of wages, in the absence of any distribution of wage slips. Additionally, corruption, shortage

of NREGA functionaries, appointment of dedicated Block programme officers, and shortage of junior engineers are some problems keeping NREGA from reviving the rural economy of Jharkhand making productive assets that bring in additional income.

<http://indiatogether.org/destruction-of-nrega-with-evidence-from-jharkhand-government>

Date Accessed: 17.3.2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

Bihar Slashes Spending on Education and Social Welfare**(Alok Gupta, *Down to Earth*, March 16, 2015)**

In a move that is likely to bring the state's development policies under fire, the Bihar government has slashed funds allocated to education, social welfare and rural development departments for the fiscal year 2015-2016. The Budget allocation has reduced for these sectors in the following manner.

- Allocation for education has reduced by nearly Rs 2,000 crore.
- For social welfare, it has been reduced by Rs 470 crore
- For rural development, funds have reduced by around Rs 1,500 crore.

The government's decision to reduce budget allocations for key departments comes at a time when the Economic Survey 2015-16 has revealed that agriculture in the state is witnessing a negative growth of around 12 per cent. It has also stated that Bihar's double-digit growth rate of 10.75 per cent has now reduced to 9.92 per cent. At the same time, the state's power sector got a major boost, with an increase from last year's budget of Rs 6,354 crore to Rs 8,436 crore. The state's power sector is, however, largely coal-based and its performance is impacted by the availability of coal.

Disappointed by the budget, economist N K Chowdhary blamed the myopic development policies of the Bihar Chief Minister. "Nearly 70 per cent of Bihar's population is dependent on agriculture that has witnessed a marginal increase in the budget allocation. The state government should have focused on social welfare and agriculture," he said.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/bihar-slashes-spending-education-and-social-welfare>

Date Accessed: 17.03.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

GOVERNMENT**BJP to Push for Stronger Anti-Cattle Laws***(The Hindu, March 16, 2015)*

As per sources in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the party will pursue stronger anti-cattle slaughter laws in all States while actively pursuing the legislations in States ruled by it. While Haryana has already tabled such a law Rajasthan is likely to do so next.

Mayankeshwar Singh, national convenor of the BJP's Cow Development Cell, said that BJP's manifesto in Bihar will also promise banning cattle slaughter if BJP comes to power in the upcoming state elections. While the party remains committed to a complete ban on cow slaughter, it will not push for a Central legislation as the issue is contentious. The party aims to build a consensus on the matter first.

In 1996, the 13-day BJP government faced political isolation after it vowed to bring a legislation aiming to ban cattle slaughter.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bjp-for-law-against-cattle-slaughter-in-all-states/article6996349.ece>

Date Accessed: 16.03.2015

(Afreen Faridi)

Nationalisation of Waterways Opposed*(Free Press Journal, March 20, 2015)*

Congress MP Shantaram Naik in Rajyasabha has opposed Government's move to nationalise waterways. According to him nationalisation of waterways by NDA government attempts to encroach on the authority of state governments. Explaining the role and authority of state governments over rivers passing through their states, Shantaram Naik has "opposed the nationalisation of waterways that has been initiated by Union Shipping and Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari." He asserted that it would amount to an "encroachment on the authority of state governments on the rivers."

In his special mention in Rajyasabha, Mr. Naik recognized the importance of waterways in improvement of the mode of transport of goods and passengers. However, he suggested Ministry of Shipping and Transport to support financially to state governments for developing waterways.

Along with authority of state governments on rivers, Mr. Naik also pointed towards riverbank area. He said, "the nationalisation of waterways involves controlling riverbank

areas running into thousands of square metres on both sides of the rivers concerned that are now under the control of the state governments." He was particularly concerned about the declaration of Mandovi and Zuari rivers of his state, Goa, as part of the national waterways.

<http://www.freepressjournal.in/nationalisation-of-waterways-opposed/#sthash.KLG14e4Q.dpuf>

Date Accessed: 20.03.2015

(Jeet Singh)

BJP Acts to End Beef Shortage in Goa: Starts Importing Meat from Maharashtra, Karnataka*(Mayabhushan Navgenkar, Firstpost, March 14, 2015)*

The Bhartiya Janta Party has acted to replenish the supply of fresh beef in the State of Goa, which had been facing severe shortage in its supply over the last few months. Even though the party cadre has been against cow slaughter elsewhere in the country, the animal husbandry ministry of the State BJP-led coalition government came under severe pressure from the sizeable Christian community of the State for failing to handle the beef shortage crisis. The government has plans to now import meat from neighboring States of Karnataka and Maharashtra and serve it through a network of existing private sector cold storages. "Goa consumes anywhere between 30 tons to 50 tons of beef every day. The Goa Meat Complex (GMC) will source slaughtered, de-boned beef from other states and sell it through cold storages operated by members of the All Goa Cold Storage Owners Association," said, chairperson of the GMC, Lyndon Monteiro. The GMC is the State's only abattoir, which functions under the aegis of the Animal Husbandry ministry.

Beef consumers in the State, who make up around 30 percent of the population blamed the BJP led government for lack of beef, however Monteiro preferred to allocate the blame to inter-state beef mafia as well as local traders who he alleged, had deliberately downed their shutters for 10 days. In turn the beef traders of the State blamed the animal rights NGO's for targeting them. He has also declared that since the beef traders failed to respond in the weeks time that was awarded to resolve the crisis, the GMC has plans to bypass them by buying and selling their own beef. He also added, "that in time the Goa government would start its own chain of beef selling stores. In the interim, beef will be sold through the 65 cold storage centres located in major towns in the state".

Beef forms an important part of diet as a vital source of protein in Christian homes. Incidentally the current shortage

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

comes at the time of Lent, when Christians, who account for 26 percent of Goa's population, avoid red meat. "However, beef has been in short supply in Goa ever since the Akhil Vishwa Jai Shrirama Gosanvardhan Kendra, an NGO which backed a ban on cattle slaughter, in 2013 petitioned the Bombay High Court for a ban on cattle slaughter, citing atrocities on cattle being brought to the GMC." The High Court in its order following the petition, said that the slaughter would be overseen in the future by officials and the representative of the NGO at the abattoir. **"Beef traders in Goa now claim that the NGO has been harassing them and had been refusing to allow slaughter of any cattle"**. According to Munna Bepari, who is the spokesperson of the All Goa Meat Traders Association, the Kendra gives various reasons like the sick or productive state of the cattle to avert slaughter. He also alleged that the Kendra also stops them from bringing slaughtered cattle into the State. However, Kendra officials said that they can't allow the slaughter of sick animals as it is against the law. Monteiro has also claimed that a section of beef traders, are in cahoots with an illegal beef mafia which operated across the states of Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra and continue to attempt getting illegal beef into the State of Goa.

<http://www.firstpost.com/india/bjp-acts-end-beef-shortage-go-starts-importing-meat-maharashtra-karnataka-2153619.html>

Date Accessed: 20.03.2015
(Rohit Chauhan)

EDUCATION

RSS Seeks Education in Mother Tongue or State Languages

(*New Indian Express*, March 16, 2015)

A resolution passed by Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), the RSS's top decision and policy making body, called "upon the Centre and state governments to review their present language policies and ensure an effective system to impart education in mother tongue or in constitutionally recognised state languages and simultaneously take initiative for use of Bhartiya languages in education, administration and delivery of justice."

The ABPS noted that leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malviya, Rabindranath Tagore, B R Ambedkar and S Radhakrishnan and scientists including C V Raman, P C Ray and J C Bose supported the use of mother tongue to impart education and considered it "scientific and natural."

Although the resolution stated that while the RSS supported the use of various languages, including foreign, to impart

education however, they considered that the use of mother tongue or state languages was more 'natural' and was essential for cultural moorings.

The resolution stated that, "A student educated in a foreign language gets alienated from his surroundings, traditions, culture and values of life, at the same time one also loses his identity and will remain ignorant of ancient knowledge, science and literature."

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/RSS-Asks-Centre-to-Encourage-Education-in-Mother-Tongue/2015/03/16/article2715778.ece1>

Date Accessed: 16.03.2015

(Afreen Faridi)

ENERGY

Government Yet to Devise Policies for Scaling Up Solar Capacity to 100 GW by 2022

(Anindya Upadhyaya, *Economic Times*, March 17, 2015)

The government's ambitious plan to install solar plants with 1 lakh megawatt capacity looks set to be a non-starter in 2015-16. This is because the departments that need to contribute with supportive policies on issues such as rooftop solar panels, tax breaks and subsidies, have not made the necessary commitments so far. As a result, the clean energy ministry has kept the solar installation target for 2015-16 the same as last year at 1,100 mw, instead of accelerating it significantly to achieve the Rs 6 lakh crore target of scaling up solar capacity from the current 3,000 mw, or 3 gigawatt (gw), to 100 gw by 2022, in the country.

None of the government departments, including finance, urban development, revenue, power and agriculture, were ready to make the commitments required to meet this target in an inter-ministerial meeting. The budget allocated Rs 2,700 crore to the ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) for 2015-16. This included targets on projects ranging from ultra mega solar parks (above 500 mw) to micro grids and rooftop installations.

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has prepared a cabinet note which requests for transmission and distribution infrastructure from power ministry to enable solar installations, for tax breaks from the revenue department on manufacturing and making rooftop installation compulsory at certain locations from the urban development ministry. MNRE is now looking for less expensive ways to kick-start solar energy projects such as micro grids that supply electricity to a small number of

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

houses in villages.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/government-yet-to-devise-policies-for-scaling-up-solar-capacity-to-100-gw-by-2022/articleshow/46591003.cms>

Date Accessed: 17.03.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

ENVIRONMENT

Mumbai's Waste Disposal Problem

(Anto Antony, Bhuma Shrivastava, *Livemint*, March 17, 2015)

This article gives an insight into Mumbai's swelling problem of waste disposal, with 11,000 tonnes of trash each day. Deonar, Asia's oldest and largest disposal site is bursting, with more than 500 trucks of waste being added each day. The surging population of 18.4 million in Mumbai is pushing the basic and inadequate infrastructure to a breaking point, which is true for most of urban India. Exhaustion of landfills and the unavailability of options for dumping waste are straining the system.

According to a 2013 report for Mumbai's Development Plan, about 80% of the refuse mixes biodegradables with recyclable plastic, glass, paper and metal. Backyard burning has worsened air pollution, and street littering contributes to the outbreak of diseases. Rabid dogs and exposed garbage piles are a common sight, which shows a scenario completely in contrast with the current government's obsession with "a modern nation dotted with 100 high-tech metropolises."

Finding newer landfills is unlikely to solve the problem as the real solution must lie in processing the waste rather than dumping it. According to Manjeet Kripalani, executive director of think tank Gateway House, "Dump yards are a disgrace to Modi's Clean India campaign. There is a yawning gap between these vision initiatives and ground reality." Policy and effective administration must target waste management as the current method of waste disposal is a health and environment hazard, and is also encroaching upon prime real estate in many cities.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/xZdqBRJhyDqYhx1UAmOvjK/Mumbai-is-being-buried-under-a-mountain-of-its-own-trash.html>

Date Accessed: 17.3.2015

(Kasturi Mishra)

Green India Mission and MGNREGA Merged

(Millennium Post, March 16, 2015)

In a bid to improved India's forest cover, the government merged the 'National Mission for a Green India' with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The National Mission implemented by the Environment Ministry aims at afforestation of 10 million hectares of land over the next decade.

At the moment green works such as water harvesting, afforestation and farm forestry are undertaken by the Rural Development Ministry through the MGNREGS. "To further synergise these efforts and to collectively address the climate change concerns, the government has come out with convergence guidelines after consulting both Environment and Rural Development Ministries."

The guidelines for convergence seek to strengthen co-ordination at field-level for increasing forest cover and boosting forest-based livelihoods for about 3 million households. All land, including village common lands, community lands, revenue wastelands, shifting cultivation areas, wetlands and private agricultural lands can be forested under this convergence. Forest works such as pre-plantation, pit digging, planting and watering, fencing, plant support and protection activities, weeding, mulching and manuring the plants among others can be undertaken for afforestation through MGNREGA.

Technical advice to each gram panchayat will be provided by the State Forest Development Agencies (SFDA) before July each year while meeting the cost from MGNREGA funds. The SFDA will also provide material for fencing, organic manure besides training youth from MGNREGA households for forest conservation and other related activities.

All wages will be met from central grants under MGNREGA, and the material component of the costs will be shared in a 75:25 ratio between the Centre and State governments. Under the Green India Mission, "the government will provide 90 per cent funds for implementing the scheme in northeast and special category states while 75 per cent for rest of India." Modern technology such as remote sensing will be used to monitor the progress of this initiative.

GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Environment Ministry was criticized by a parliamentary panel last year for failing to effectively implement the Rs 3,044 crore national afforestation programme that was launched in 2002. The parliamentary panel also found that India's forest cover had decreased by 367 sq km between 2009 and 2011.

<http://www.millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=98334>

Date Accessed: 16.03.2015
(Afreen Faridi)

employed in the agricultural sector, forcing them to crowd the rural sectors, and migrate to cities.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/machines-drive-90-of-power-in-farming-humans-share-drops-to-5/articleshow/46578959.cms>

Date accessed: 17.3.2015
(Kasturi Mishra)

AGRICULTURE

Power in Indian Farming Undergoes Substantial Change

(The Economic Times, March 16, 2015)

A study on farm mechanization done by C R Mehta, principal scientist, and colleagues at the Central Institute of Agricultural Engineering, Bhopal has estimated that the share of human power available for carrying out the operations in farming has shrunk to 5%, the same as that of draught animals. More than 90% of the power is now drawn from mechanical sources: tractors and power tillers provide 47%; electric motors provide 27% and diesel engines 16%. This indicates a far-reaching change in Indian agriculture that has occurred during the last few decades. These shares have been calculated using an average value of power that a human or a draught animal or any of the machines generate per unit of land.

In 1971-72, 60% of the power was provided by humans and animals, 15% by farm labourers and 45% by animals. In 1991-92, this collective share had dropped to 26% (labour accounted for 9%). Tractors have made a jump from a mere 7% to 47%. In most crops, tractors are used for initial land preparation, even by small land holders. Even threshing is mostly mechanical along with drawing of water, these days. However, many other operations, including paddy transplanting, are still done by agricultural workers.

The study however warns that overall farm mechanization in India has reached only about 40%, compared to 95% levels in advanced countries. The timeliness and quality of farm operations with animate sources of power are extremely poor. One would expect that as more and more machines take over, people would be freed from this backbreaking work. However, this is not happening. As per Census 1991 and Census 2011 data, population increased by 43% in these 20 years but the number of landless agricultural laborers shot up by a much greater 93%. This is primarily due to the absence of employment opportunities for the under-

GENDER

SEBI Asks Companies to Appoint More Women on Boards by March-end Or Face Regulatory Action

(Anirvan Ghosh, *Huffington Post*, March 16, 2015)

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has been asking companies to appoint atleast one woman board member in their boards as per the new law passed in 2013. SEBI has found that even after several directions in this regard, over one-third of India's top 500 companies did not appoint a single woman to their boards.

SEBI had earlier fixed a timeline of October 2014 for this measure to be implemented. It later extended the timeline by another six months. In its second and latest extension, SEBI has asked all listed companies to make sure that they have atleast one woman board member by the end of March, or risk regulatory action.

“India passed a new law in 2013 that mandates any public company with five or more directors to have at least one woman board member. That year, only 4.7 percent of India's corporate directors were women, and little seems to have changed from that time. SEBI's action is to ensure that rule is adhered to.”

Anirvan Ghosh in his article published in Huffington Post also raised question on appointment done by some companies and direction of SEBI in this matter. According to him the regulator has not spelt out if the board member can be from a promoter's family. “Several companies appointed wives and daughters on their boards to show compliance, but that does not help corporate governance. Currently, India is way behind some other countries, some of which have adopted quotas for higher representation of women. According to a report, both Australia and Norway adopted 40 percent quotas for women in board positions. In France, half of the listed companies have atleast three women on the board. This happened after it implemented a quota system in 2010. Since then, women representation in boards has risen to 29.7 percent in publicly listed companies from just 7.2 percent in 2004.”

http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/03/16/sebi-women-on-boards_n_6875818.html?utm_hp_ref=in-news

Date Accessed: 20.03.2015

(Jeet Singh)

INDIA AND WORLD

INDIA IN THE WORLD**Prime Minister's Approach to the Indian Ocean Region Lacks Clarity***(WPS Sidhu, Live Mint, March 16, 2015)*

Prime Minister's approach to the Indian Ocean region underlines its significance for India's regional strategic interests and global ambitions and, doubtless, seeks to redress decades of neglect by India's leadership, however the initiative lacks clarity and the necessary capacity to succeed. It appears that the Prime Minister may have gone overboard to describe India's maritime initiative on the Indian Ocean; it has been variously presented as "Project Mausam", "Spice Route", "Sagar Mala", Blue Revolution and SAGAR—Security and Growth for All in the Region. This sounds like a reactive and confused cacophony, especially compared to the simple and catchy Chinese vision of the "maritime silk route" or the US articulation of a "pivot" or "rebalancing" to the Asia-Pacific. India needs to come up with a similar simple and evocative phrase and brand it consistently.

However, branding India's strategy is only the start of a long process for New Delhi to secure its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean. India is struggling to get financing and construction of Chabahar port (in Iran) underway and has only just offered \$500 million to the Maldives for infrastructure projects and handed over a single Indian-built coast guard vessel to Mauritius.

While India should be the primary economic and security provider in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) countries, it is likely to outmatch by China, which is only an observer. Even on the security front, apart from the trilateral situation awareness cooperation with Sri Lanka and the Maldives, India has done very little either to build up its own capacity or that of the IORA littoral states, which would help to secure India's interests in the region. There has been little or no effort to coordinate counter-piracy operations with other IORA nations, even though this is in everyone's interest. Clearly, Prime Minister's Indian Ocean initiative is long overdue. However, for it to succeed the initiative must be build upon and sustained by Indian government.

<http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/hPow93T9AkP0vrr7fOb8kM/A-string-without-pearls.html>

Date Accessed: 17.03.2015

(Devyani Bhushan)

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**UN Agency Begins Relocation of 50,000 Flood-Affected Refugees in Ethiopia***(United Nations News Centre, March 17, 2015)*

The United Nations noted that the reallocation of 50,000 South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia from flood-prone areas has started. The move has come ahead of the rainy seasons that begin in late April. Refugees are being moved away western Ethiopia where Baro river burst its bank in August last year due to heavy rains.

The refugee group "from Nip Nip will be moved to the existing Pugnido camp, which currently hosts nearly 56,000 South Sudanese refugees." A new camp, Jewi, is now being developed to accommodate larger groups of refugees coming from western Ethiopia. United Nations for High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) notes that finding suitable areas for camp has been a challenge as sites identified earlier were later declared unsuitable.

Since December 2013, over 2 million people have been uprooted from the South Sudan due to increasing violence. Over 1.5 million South Sudanese have been internally displaced and more than half a million have crossed across the border to neighboring countries, especially to Ethiopia, which now hosts the largest refugee population in Africa. Currently, there are 670,000 refugees in Ethiopia mainly from Somalia, followed by South Sudan, Sudan and Eritrea.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50350#.VQI1VUttIpE>

Date Accessed: 18.3.2015

(Shriyam Gupta)

New UN Report Highlights 'Terrifying' Impact of Ebola on Nine Million Children*(United Nations News Centre, March 17, 2015)*

The United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) noted in its report that over nine million children have seen 'death beyond their comprehension' due to Ebola and protecting them would be crucial in the fight against the virus.

As per the report, 24,000 people and 5,000 children have been affected from the virus, "while more than 16,000 children have lost one or both parents or their primary

INDIA AND WORLD

caregiver.” Moreover, about 10,000 people have lost their lives because of the disease. The response needs community participation, which is increasing. In Liberia, 72% of the people noted that those with Ebola symptoms would get better care. This is significant as there is a tendency to keep Ebola victims at home that causes the disease to spread into the community. Liberia has not reported any new cases for two consecutive weeks.

Barbara Bentein, UNICEF's Global Emergency Coordinator for Ebola, said that the outbreak is not over till the time there are no new cases and every contact has been traced and monitored. UNICEF has been instrumental in containing Ebola when schools reopened following closure, which left five million children out of school. Continued investment to curb Ebola will also add to health care infrastructure that can be used to deal with other diseases such as measles, pneumonia and diarrhea.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50345#.VQkITkttIpE>

Date Accessed: 18.3.2015
(Shriyam Gupta)

Middle Income Nations Home to Half the World's Hungry

(Inter Press Service, March 18, 2015)

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) reported in its study that about half of world's hungry people, nearly 363 million, reside in rising middle-income countries. These include Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and Mexico. The report highlights that these countries need to reshape the policies to focus on nutrition and health, closing gender gap in agriculture and improving rural infrastructure. Moreover, attention needs to be given to regulate food production to reduce food borne diseases and improve social protection for rural poor.

The report found a strong relation between declining open defecation and fall in stunted growth of children. “Bangladeshi children living in places where open defecation had been reduced were taller than children in neighboring West Bengal, India, where open defecation is still common, even at the same levels of economic wealth.”

It is often noted that food insecurity is a consequence of political disturbance. However, the report notes that food insecurity can also fuel violence especially in countries that are importing food. “Arab countries import about 50 percent of their food and were thus hard hit by the global food price

spikes in 2008 and 2011.” Middle East and North African nations import food and their dependency ratios exceed 50 percent on average. Thus, fall in oil prices have affected them the most as they depend on oil revenues to import food.

Oil prices also have an impact on food because the world food system is highly dependent on oil. “Oil is the key fuel for production and for transporting food from field to market, and fuel costs, he said, make up as much as 50 to 60 per cent of total shipping costs.” Besides transportation, costs for fertilizers and chemicals make up 50 percent of the production costs for crops like corn and wheat. Grain prices are also affected by oil market as crops such as corn is highly dependent on oil as its production is being diverted to biofuel.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/03/middle-income-nations-home-to-half-the-worlds-hungry/>

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(Shriyam Gupta)

OPINION/BOOKS

OPINIONS

By Scaling Down the Number of Rape Crisis Centres, the Government Stands Exposed

(Economic and Political Weekly, March 14, 2015)

The debate around rape has been reignited after the release of the documentary- India's Daughter. Yet the debate has missed the central issue of why, despite stringent laws, the number of incidents of rape continues to grow and the conviction rate remains low- 23% in 2013. The questions regarding a failing justice system and what is being done to change the mindset of the males in the country are still not being discussed in the public debate

Misogynist statements of the accused rapist in the December 16 case have renewed demands for death penalty. Such events coincided with mob lynching a rapist in Nagaland. Along with this, members of parliament raised demands for summary justice. All these reinforced the belief that death penalty is the best preventive method for any crime.

In the uproar, the media has missed on how the government has cut down on the infrastructure to assist rape victims. Finance Minister announced a budget allocation of 1,000 crore for Nirbhaya fund but did not mention that the previous year's fund lie unused. Minister for women and child development Maneka Gandhi, last year promised a one-stop rape crises centre in each district of the country that would be equipped with doctors and facilities to provide women seeking assistance after sexual assault. "The number of crisis centres has been scaled down to just 36 from the promised 660. An allocation of Rs 244.48 crore has been cut down to Rs 18 crore."

Issue Coordinator: Mr. Jeet Singh

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These rape centres are crucial to ensure women report rape, are provided adequate assistance and are offered counseling. Other countries in the world have such centres as part of the public hospital system. Promising few centres would make them scattered around the country making them inaccessible for most populous. The question regarding whether there should be a separate building for such centres does not deny the fact that these centres are needed. Attention should be focused on strengthening laws, creating awareness and strengthening support structures for assaulted women.

<http://www.epw.in/editorials/more-outrage-less-action.html>

Date Accessed: 18.3.2015

(Shriyam Gupta)

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