

Child Malnutrition and Policy Approach in India



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Child Malnutrition and Policy Approach in India

Introduction:

Undernourishment of children in India is a complex issue. It involves number of factors such as hunger, starvation, poor health, hygiene, and number of other social, cultural, economical, regional and structural arrangements. The government of India has been monitoring malnutrition among young children from 1975 through various schemes and surveys to understand the magnitude and impact of child malnutrition (Lal, 2003). Over the period, it has also launched number of programs and policies to ensure full nourishment for youngest population of India. Various government and non-governmental reports suggests that we have made remarkable progress on this front in last ten years. The mortality of infant and children below five years has gone down, the coverage of nutritional schemes such as Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) has improved and the nutritional level among children below five year has shown significant progress. However, despite these achievements, the nutritional status of children remains poor in India. According to a latest UN-India report, India remains home to one quarter of world's undernourishment population. Nearly one third of world's food-insecure people are in India; as a result the country constitute over one third of world's underweight children (UN-India, 2015).

According to an UNICEF report, India accounts around 22% of the total under-five children death worldwide, this is the highest number in the world. According to, Save the Children, of the 26 million children born in India every year, approximately 1.83 million children die before their fifth birthday¹. Under nutrition of children is the primary reason for such a large-scale death of innocents. Globally under nutrition is responsible for 45% of child death (PHFI, 2015); whereas, according to an estimate it is responsible for around 50% of child deaths in India (FLAIR, 2015). Under nutrition among children can lead to one or many disabilities or deficiencies which then can be described on the parameters of malnutrition. The World Health Assembly (WHA) of World Health Organization (WHO) identified six global health priorities for next 10 years to deal with issues of malnutrition. These priorities are stunting (low height for age), Anemia (low level of hemoglobin in blood), Wasting (low weight for height), Overweight (high weight for height), Breastfeeding (exclusive breastfeeding up to six months) and Low birth-weight (less than 2.5 kg when born). India has been monitoring Stunting, Wasting, Under-weight, Anemia and Exclusive breast-feeding through various surveys. However, most of these surveys are random and not all parameters of malnutrition are comparable. Nevertheless, data of various surveys from 1992 to 2014, on three major parameters namely Stunting, Wasting and Underweight can be compared. Reports comparing these surveys on malnutrition suggest that, India has been moving on right direction but the changes have been slow. This article is an attempt to summarize the policy approach to address responsible factors for persisting malnutrition and the impact of child malnutrition in India.

Factors Responsible for Prevailing Child Malnutrition and Policy Approach:

According to UNICEF, malnutrition and child death are two manifestations of a multi-sectoral child development problem. Describing the framework and causes of malnutrition, UNICEF divides potential causes of malnutrition in three different categories. These categories are- immediate, underlying and basic causes. These causes are further explained as follows:

1. **Immediate Causes:** Inadequate dietary intake and infectious diseases
2. **Underlying Causes:** Household food insecurity, inadequate maternal and childcare and inadequate health services and health environment.
3. **Basic Causes:** Formal and non-formal institutions, political and ideological superstructures, economic structures, potential resources and female education.

¹ <https://www.savethechildren.in/87-news-releases/130-child-mortality-in-india.html>

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The Nutrition Foundation of India (NFI) however, argues that the income poverty intensifies malnutrition. According to NFI, “Income poverty leads to women being engaged in hard physical labour, living in unsanitary conditions leading to frequent bouts of infections, low income resulting in low food intake and the well known cycle of frequent pregnancies and large families (Save the Children, 2009).” Nutrition policies in India are largely based on NFI approach. Accordingly, nutritional policymaking process in India has been considering income poverty as a main cause of malnutrition among women and children. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is the largest and currently operated oldest nutritional programme that attempts to improve nutritional status of children below 6 years, pregnant and lactating mothers. Through this scheme, government provides supplementary nutrition to the children and women in order to protect adverse nutritional impact of income poverty on them. The other nutritional schemes for school going children namely ‘Mid Day Meal’ under ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’ has also been implemented with similar objective.

Child Malnutrition remains a big challenge in India, despite having more than 40 years old ICDS programme and 10 years old Mid Day Meal scheme. In many Tribal and Dalit regions, the malnutrition among children remains very high compared to the national average. For instance, according to a report by Action Aid India, the malnutrition level among children of Sahariya tribes in India is as high as 66.3 per cent (Jain, 2007). Various academicians and activists have argued that the provision of additional food or increased income is not adequate to address complexity of malnutrition. In a study of malnourished children of Sahariyas in Rajasthan, Aditya Malaviya (2012) reveal that government has offered ‘soya buffs’ as supplementary food to Sahariya children but it is alien food to them. He further revealed that these children go hungry rather than eating something unfamiliar. In another example, he explained the accessibility of health institutions. Rajasthan government launched an exclusive policy for Sahariyas that provides incentives for seeking treatment at nutrition rehabilitation centers. But, they have not been helpful as the centers are far away from the Sahariya villages.

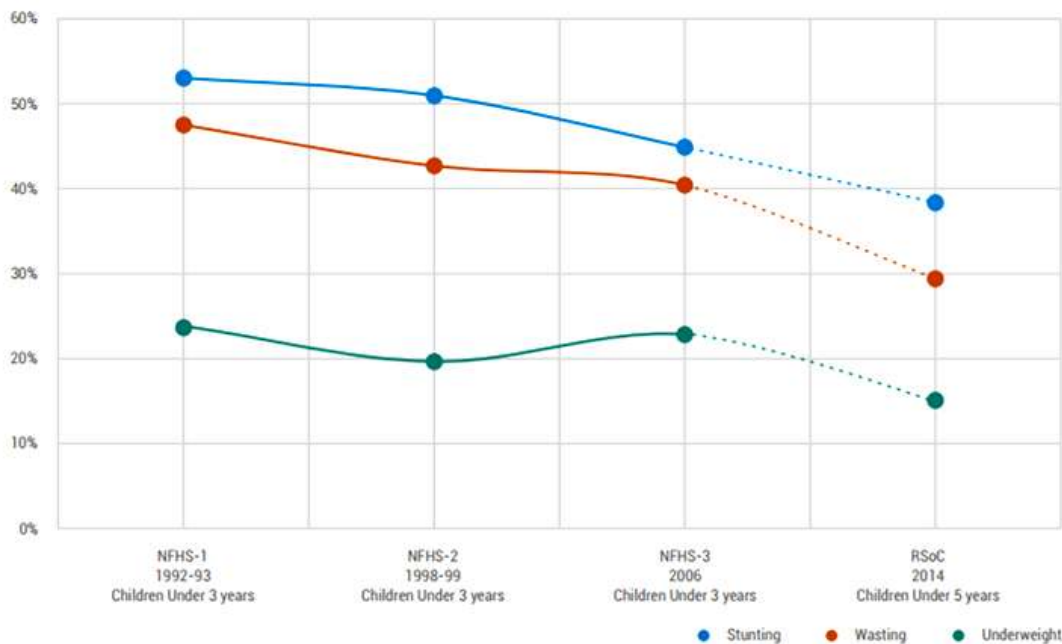
The above example of Sahariya community exposes the implementation of unilaterally planned schemes. UNICEF in its explanation attempted to describe the complexity of child malnutrition. But these complexities vary from region to region and community to community. It seems that policy makers in India have focused largely on immediate causes of malnutrition; and touched upon underlying cause as defined by UNICEF. But our policies failed to understand and address basic causes of malnutrition such as political ideological superstructure, economic structure, potential resources and formal and non-formal institutions. Regional and community level malnutrition variation lays in these basic causes, which needs to be understood in order to handle prevailing malnutrition in India.

Impact of Child Malnutrition in India: Stunting, Wasting and Underweight:

Stunting is a measure of chronic under nutrition; Wasting indicates acute under nutrition; and underweight is composite of these two conditions (PHFI, 2015). A large child population under five year in India has been suffering from these deficiencies. According to Rapid Survey on Children (RSoC) conducted by Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2014, 38.7 per cent of Indian Children under the age of five are stunted, 19.8 per cent are wasted, and 42.5 per cent are underweight. The oldest comparable data that we have was collected by NFHS-1 (National Family Health Survey) in 1992-93. Comparing these two surveys reveals that the rate of stunting, wasting and underweight among children under five has seen a decline. According to NFHS-1 in 1992-93, 53 per cent Indian children were stunted, 18 per cent wasted and 53 per cent underweight. The latest ‘India Health Report- Nutrition’ released by Public Health Foundation has categorized this decline in malnutrition among children in two different period. First period is from 1992-93 (NFHS-1) to 2006 (NFHS-3) and the second period is from 2006 (NFHS-3) to 2014 (RSoC). The report notes that during 1992-93 to 2006 the progress was slow and in the period from 2006 to 2014, India’s progress on this front accelerated remarkably.

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Figure: Trends in Nutritional Status in India, 1993 to 2014



Source: PHFI, 2015

According to the ‘India Health Report- Nutrition’, 2015, despite progressive improvement in last ten years, India lags behind many countries in Sub-Saharan countries. “Indeed, some states in India compare unfavorably to the poorest countries in Africa.” India lags behind even in South Asia. India dominates economically in South Asian region especially in terms of per capita income but its nutritional outcomes remain poor. South Asian countries are performing much better than India. For example during the period of 2006 to 2014 India recorded 2.3 percent average annual rate of reduction in stunting. Whereas Nepal during 2006 to 2011 recorded, 3.3 per cent average annual rate of reduction in stunting.

Figure: Average Annual Rate of Reduction in Under-5 Stunting, 200 to 2014, by Country



Source: PHFI, 2015

Malnutrition among children below 5 year varies from state to state and one community to another. The RSoC-2014 has revealed significant variance in nutritional outcome of children across the community and region. According to the survey the wasting and underweight among children under-five is wide spread. The wasting rate in 13 states is more than the national average of 15.1 percent. Similarly, the underweight rate in 11 States, among under five children, is more than the national average of 29.4. Stunting among children is largely concentrated in few states. Eight states have child-stunting rate more than national average of 38.7 percent.

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Table: Prevalence of Stunting, Wasting and Underweight in Different States

Stunting		Wasting		Underweight	
State	Number in Percentage	State	Number in Percentage	State	Number in Percentage
Uttar Pradesh	50.4	Andhra Pradesh	19.0	Jharkhand	42.1
Bihar	49.4	Tamil Nadu	19.0	Bihar	37.1
Jharkhand	47.4	Gujarat	18.7	Madhya Pradesh	36.1
Chhattisgarh	43.0	Maharashtra	18.6	Uttar Pradesh	34.5
Meghalaya	42.9	Odisha	18.3	Odisha	34.4
Gujarat	41.6	Madhya Pradesh	17.5	Chhattisgarh	33.9
Madhya Pradesh	41.5	Tripura	17.1	Gujarat	33.5
Assam	40.6	Karnataka	17.0	Rajasthan	31.5
All India	38.7	Arunachal Pradesh	17.0	Meghalaya	30.9
		Jharkhand	15.6	Tripura	30.5
		Kerala	15.5	West Bengal	30.0
		Goa	15.4	All India	29.4
		West Bengal	15.3		
		All India	15.1		

Source: PHFI, 2015

Data of RSoC, 2014, also reveals that the malnutrition is high among children of poor and disadvantaged communities. The child stunting rate of children of the SCs and STs Communities is very high in comparison to socially privileged caste groups. More than 42 per cent of children of SCs and STs are stunted when compared to 34 percent stunted children in other privileged caste groups. Similar pattern has been observed in the case of wasted and underweight children. Economic condition of family is another big contributor in malnutrition. The percentage of child malnutrition (stunting, wasted and underweight) in lowest income group is double or more than double compared to highest income group. The Survey also reveals that the child malnutrition in rural areas is high compared to urban areas. Various other reliable data and studies have shown that socially disadvantaged communities such as SCs and STs are largely poor and living in villages. Children from these communities are deprived of social, economical and residence advantages and hence easily fall in the trap of malnutrition.

Table: Community Wise Nutritional Status of Children below Five Years (figures in percentage)

Key Indicators	Residence			Gender		Social Category				Wealth Index	
	Total	Rural	Urban	Male	Female	SC	ST	OB C	Other	WI-Lowest	WI-Highest
Stunted	38.7	41.6	32.0	39.5	37.8	42.4	42.3	38.9	33.9	50.7	26.7
Severely stunted	17.3	19.1	13.2	17.6	16.9	19.3	19.5	17.8	14.2	25.8	10.7
Wasted	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.6	14.5	15.5	18.7	14.8	13.6	17.0	13.0
Severely wasted	4.6	4.5	4.8	4.8	4.4	4.9	5.3	4.4	4.4	5.0	4.4
Underweight	29.4	31.6	24.3	30.0	28.7	32.7	36.7	29.3	23.6	42.1	18.6
Severely Underweight	9.4	10.6	6.9	10.0	8.9	10.8	13.0	9.3	7.0	16.3	5.1

Source: RSoC, 2014

The health impacts of the poor nutrition is not limited to Stunting, Wasting, Anemia and underweight among children, rather it has more severe short term and long term consequences for affected children. According to PHFI (2015) even mildly underweight children face nearly twice the risk of death as compared to children having diseases such as diarrhea, malaria and acute respiratory infections. "Low birth weight infants (less than 2.5 kg) are faced with 2 to 10 times the risk of death compared with normal birth weight infants". Those who survive during undernourished childhood suffer in their adulthood. According to the PHFI (2015), poor nutritional childhood contributes to serious,

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non-communicable diseases such as coronary vascular disease, diabetes and some cancers in their adulthood. According to the report, even low birth weight or early-life under nutrition increases the risk of chronic disease, such as diabetes and heart diseases in adulthood.

Conclusion:

Child malnutrition is a global concern and India too recognizes it. Through Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) India had committed to reduce malnutrition in India, but the latest report of government of India on achievements of MDGs reveals that it has failed to achieve many crucial targets related to child nutrition such as reduction in child and infant mortality, reduction in number of underweight children and universal coverage of immunization (GoI, 2015). In another global commitment, India being a member state of WHO, endorsed global targets for improving malnutrition among children and women. In order to develop a clear pathway to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of eradicating all form of malnutrition by 2030, the World Health Assembly (WHA) of WHO has set six global nutritional targets for 2025. Despite endorsing these targets, India's performance is not satisfactory. The Global Nutrition Report-2015 released by the WHO in December 2015 reveals that India is on track to meet only 2 of 6 global targets on nutrition.

Data proves that we have made progress in last one decade but it also reveals that the rate of progress is very slow. According to India Health Report-Nutrition, 2015, at current rate, India will achieve child stunting rate of poor African countries such as Ghana and Togo only in 2030 and stunting rate of China (10%) in 2055. The persisting high child malnutrition has huge social and economical cost. We as country cannot progress until we provide healthy childhood to our new generation. Global targets such as MDGs, SDGs and WHA are important to follow but we will have to come up with our own strategies realizing the diverse ground realities.

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Headlines

Let's Use the CAG's Criticisms to Strengthen, not Weaken, School Midday Meals

(Dipa Sinha, *The Wire*, 9th January 2016)

A recent audit report by the CAG found a number of implementation gaps, including discrepancies in school attendance figures, poor infrastructure, inadequate nutritive content of the meals and so on. It also makes some useful recommendations to address these shortcomings. It would, however, be inappropriate to read this report as an indictment of the MDMS, as some news reports seem to be doing. number of studies of midday meals in India have shown that the scheme not only enhances school enrolment, retention and attendance but also has positive effects on child nutrition. Nothing in the CAG report invalidates these findings.

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/01/09/lets-use-the-cags-criticisms-to-strengthen-not-weaken-school-midday-meals-18337/>

Accessed on 9.01.2016

The Dangers of Relying on PPP

(*The Livemint*, January 3, 2016)

The Union government is likely to emphasize public-private partnership (PPP) projects to make up for a shortfall in investment spending in the Union budget. The reason for a lacklustre performance by PPPs goes beyond usual market conditions. PPP projects have been [mired in issues](#) such as disputes in existing contracts, non-availability of capital and regulatory hurdles related to the acquisition of land. To be fair, PPPs are not facing problems in India alone. Across the world, the record of PPPs has been very mixed, according to a wide body of research.

Read more: <http://mintonSunday.livemint.com/news/the-dangers-of-relying-on-ppp/2.4.3337887514.html>

Date Accessed: 7.01.2016

Governance & Development

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Supreme Court says Parliament may Consider Harsher Punishments for child Rape Convicts

(Daily News and Analysis, January 11, 2016)

The Supreme Court on Monday suggested the Parliament to think of awarding more stringent punishment to those convicted of raping children. The apex court made the observation during the hearing of a plea seeking castration of child abuse convicts filed by the Supreme Court Women Lawyers Association (SCWLA). The petition contended that only castration can be an effective deterrent against these heinous crimes. As many as 892 cases of child rape have been registered in 2015. According to The Hindu, Justice Misra in a written order dictated, "The pain and distress caused to a child, including infants as young as 28 days old, who knows nothing about sex and rape is nothing but brutal perversion. When a society moves this way, it has to be stopped."

Read more: <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-supreme-court-says-parliament-may-consider-harsher-punishment-for-child-rape-convicts-2164416>

Date accessed: 11.01.2016

GOVERNMENT

Jammu and Kashmir Comes under Governor's Rule

(The Huffington Post, January 10, 2016)

Jammu and Kashmir was on Saturday placed under Governor's rule with the process of new government formation following the death of Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed taking some time. The President cleared the recommendation of the Union Home Ministry for imposing Governor's rule on the basis of a recommendation from J-K Governor N N Vohra. The step was taken in view of the reluctance of Mufti's daughter Mehbooba to take oath during the mourning period, though her party has already conveyed to the Governor that 28 MLAs of the PDP legislature party backed her for the Chief Minister's post.

Read More: http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/01/10/jammu-and-kashmir_n_8947814.html?utm_hp_ref=india

Date Accessed: 11.01.2016

CONNECTIVITY

Centre Locks Horns with Telecom Firms

(The Asian Age, January 11, 2016)

Union minister for communication and information technology Ravi Shankar Prasad on Sunday lashed out at telecom service providers on the issue of call drops and said that the government would not hesitate to take stringent action against inefficient service providers. Stating that smooth network connectivity will be a vital factor for the success of the government's 'Digital India', the minister asked telecom service providers to ramp up their infrastructure. While speaking to reporters in Mumbai after reviewing the performance of state-owned undertakings such as BSNL, MTNL and India Post, the minister said that the telecom operators need to do more as the measures taken by them during the last few months are not sufficient enough to address the current crisis. On a subtle note, Mr Prasad also questioned the commitment of telecom service providers in providing better service to their customers.

Read More: <http://www.asianage.com/business/centre-locks-horns-telecom-firms-691>

Date Accessed: 11.01.2015

Governance & Development

TRANSPORT

Government to Shortly Notify Standard Operating Procedures for Protection of 'Good Samaritans'

(Dipak K Dash, *The Times of India*, January 11, 2016)

The road transport ministry will notify the standard operating procedures (SOP) in the next fortnight to protect 'good Samaritans' or bystanders from harassment and legal hassles for rushing to the aid of road crash victims. The decision has been taken after the Supreme Court asked the ministry to respond what steps are being taking to make the guidelines binding on all the stakeholders and government agencies.

As per the new norms, good Samaritans will now be allowed to leave the hospital immediately after furnishing their address and no question would be asked. It will be voluntary for such persons to give personal details including contact number. Even a bystander, who makes a phone call to inform police or emergency services for the injured, shall not be compelled to reveal his name or personal details. There is also a provision to take disciplinary action against officials who coerce or intimidate a good Samaritan to reveal his name or personal details.

Read More: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Government-to-shortly-notify-standard-operating-procedures-for-protection-of-good-Samaritans/articleshow/50525273.cms>

Date Accessed: 11.01.2016

Society

COMMUNALISM

'Hindu Samskriti' is our Identity: RSS Chief

(*Outlook*, January 10, 2016)

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat today said "Hindu samskriti (culture)" is India's identity and that is why it is known as "Hindu Rashtra" even as he stressed on organising those who accept Indian values and cultural system of unity in diversity. "Hindu samskriti or Bharatiya Samskriti, we have this as our identity. Bharat is not just a name of some part or piece of land. The land keeps increasing or decreasing based on how it is being treated. The nature of the society is its 'samskriti'. "This is the 'samskriti' which binds us all together, thus is our identity and that is the reason it is known as Hindu Rashtra. Not many know and not many believe but it is universally accepted. We all are Hindus as we have accepted the very nature of the 'samskriti'," Bhagwat was quoted saying at an event here in an RSS statement.

Read More: <http://www.outlookindia.com/news/article/hindu-samskriti-is-our-identity-rss-chief/926586>

Date Accessed: 11.01.2016

HISTORY

It is High Time to Discard the Pernicious Myth of India's Medieval Muslim 'Villians'

(Audrey Truschke, *The Wire*, 9th January 2016)

The idea that medieval Muslim rulers wreaked havoc on Indian culture and society – deliberately and due to religious bigotry – is a ubiquitous notion in 21st century India. Few people seem to realise that the historical basis for such claims is shaky to non-existent. It is time to break this mythologized caricature of the past wide open and lay bare the modern biases, politics, and interests that have fuelled such a misguided interpretation of India's Islamic history.

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/01/09/it-is-high-time-to-discard-the-pernicious-myth-of-indias-medieval-muslim-villains-18919/>

Accessed on: 9.1.2016

India and World

INDIA IN THE WORLD

Modi's Pakistan Policy

(*The Economic and Political Weekly*, January 2, 2016)

Given the extreme volatility of India-Pakistan relations in the 19 months since Narendra Modi assumed office and his branding as a "Hindu Hriday Samrat" (Emperor of the Hindu heart), it is not clear what the Prime Minister's newfound reasons for working towards improving relations with Pakistan are. Is it that he is only bending to pressure from Washington and the other Western capitals he is so besotted with and, who want India and Pakistan to engage in a dialogue?

Read more: <http://www.epw.in/journal/2016/1/editorials/modis-pakistan-policy.html#sthash.66H55Lup.dpuf>

Date Accessed: 7.01.2016

SOUTH ASIA

Effort to revive Afghanistan peace talks begins in Pakistan

(*Times of India*, January 11, 2016)

Delegates from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States sat down on Monday for talks to resurrect a stalled Afghan peace process, and end nearly 15 years of bloodshed, even as fighting with Taliban insurgents intensifies. Senior officials from the four countries are meeting in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad to launch an effort they hope will lead to negotiations with the Taliban, who are fighting to impose their strict brand of Islamist rule and are not expected at Monday's talks.

Read More: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/Effort-to-revive-Afghanistan-peace-talks-begins-in-Pakistan/articleshow/50529785.cms>

Date Accessed: 11.01.2016

MIDDLE-EAST

Middle East's Sectarian Divide Threatens to Overwhelm a Generation

(Jane Kinninmont, *The Chatham House*, January 6, 2016)

The international political fallout from the execution of a dissident Saudi cleric, Nimr Al Nimr, reflects several years of rising sectarian tensions, driven by geopolitical competition in the Middle East. Beyond today's war of words between Saudi Arabia and Iran, a deeper, long term worry is that a whole generation of people in the Middle East, where the majority of the population is under 30 years old, is growing up with the assumption that the sectarian divide is the main issue in politics.

Read more: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/middle-east-s-sectarian-divide-threatens-overwhelm-generation>

Date Accessed: 7.1.2016

EUROPE

Growing Scale of Cologne Attacks Stokes German Debate on Migrants

(John O'Donnell, *Reuters*, January 10, 2016)

Attacks on women in Cologne and other German cities on New Year's Eve have prompted more than 600 criminal complaints, with police suspicion resting on asylum seekers, putting pressure on Chancellor Angela Merkel and her open door migrant policy. The attacks, mostly targeting women and ranging from theft to sexual molestation, have prompted a highly-charged debate in Germany about its welcoming stance for refugees and migrants, more than one million of whom arrived last year. The debate on migration will be further fuelled by the acknowledgement by the authorities in North Rhine-Westphalia that a man shot dead as he tried to enter a Paris police station last week was an asylum seeker with seven identities who lived in Germany.

Read More: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-assaults-investigation-idUSKCN0U00G920160110>

Date Accessed: 11.01.2016

Opinions/ Books

OPINIONS

Need for a More Professional Bureaucracy

(*The Livemint*, January 6, 2016)

Reforms in bureaucracy and governance are relevant not only at the central level, but also at the state level. With increasing decentralization and greater fiscal autonomy, states will need to build capabilities to be able to design and implement programmes in an effective manner. Furthermore, as states compete for investments, it is likely that the ones with a more professional bureaucracy will gain.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/xQXVrkjWCxiCah6eKRsuNK/The-need-for-a-more-professional-bureaucracy.html>

Date Accessed: 7.1.2016

Bihar's Alcohol Ban

(*The Economic and Political Weekly*, January 2, 2016)

Nitish Kumar's decision to ban alcohol in Bihar may not address the problem of domestic violence, as he expects it will. The state will also lose Rs. 4000 crore in tax revenue. Moreover, banks have always led to black market sales, and then greater expenditure to enforce the ban. The answer to growing alcoholism and its related social malaise lies in higher taxes and limitations on access to alcohol.

Read more: <http://www.epw.in/journal/2016/1/commentary/bihars-alcohol-ban.html>

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