

Zika Virus- A Reminder of India's Flawed Policies?



Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-04/zika-virus-vaccine-indian-biotech-company/7139904>

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Headlines

Zika Virus- A Reminder of India's Flawed Policies?

Zika virus disease became a global health concern since last year when Brazil saw an increase in the case of microcephaly (a congenital disorder that can shrink unborn babies' brains and heads, further reducing their life expectancy) which showed possible links with the Zika virus. (Dearden 2016) After the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Zika virus as an international public health emergency, many countries including India seriously discussed ways to combat the spread of this virus. The Union Health Minister of India tweeted that there was "no case (zika) reported yet"; the very next day the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued guidelines on Zika virus disease (Health Ministry Issues Guidelines on Zika Virus Disease 2016); and media reported that Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech might have found a vaccine to prevent the spread of Zika virus. (India 2016)

Should all these assurances and measures be enough to make us feel safe from global challenge to health?

Zika virus spreads through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito. In India this will not be the first disease that has the potential to rapidly spread through mosquitoes. India has been witness to outbreaks of malaria, Japanese encephalitis, dengue, chikungunya, all of which are passed through mosquitoes. Dengue and Chikungunya in particular are spread by the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, just like Zika virus disease does. With its long history of suffering from vector born diseases should India have been already prepared to combat the Zika virus?

Do we have effective ways to disseminate information about diseases?

With the high incidence of vector borne diseases it can be safely said that India has poor mosquito control measures and the inadequacy of the same is pointed out every year around the outbreak of dengue. The number of reported cases of the disease has doubled from 40,571 in 2014 to 84,391 in 2015, up to November 15. (Gearing Up for Zika Threat 2016) Even though widespread campaigns have been undertaken during the 'dengue season' to make the public aware about the disease; a sizeable chunk of the population still remains unaware about the key aspects of dengue. This is evidenced by a study conducted on individuals from the hospital outpatient department of AIIMS which found that though a large portion of the sample population knew that the vector for dengue was a mosquito but there was very less information about the breeding and feeding habits of the same. Only around 44 percent participants reported that the mosquito breeds on stagnant water and nearly 24 percent reported that it bites during day time which is the fact. But more than half of the respondents were unaware of this and they instead used mosquito coils at night. (High Level of Awareness but Poor Practices Regarding Dengue Fever Control 2012)

As many parts of the country witnessed dengue outbreaks, the fact that we need a more aggressive public awareness campaign to disseminate information about diseases is not something that needs to be debated. The same thing stands true for Zika virus disease. It does not suffice to state in the guidelines issued by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) that- "The Central/ State Government shall take all necessary steps to address the challenge of this infection working closely with technical institutions, professionals and global health partners."¹ In face of the possible threat this virus could pose for the country the government needs to take more proactive measures such as put a deadline by which the Central and State governments need to show compliance of the guidelines issued by the MoHFW for starters. Further it can also lay down a time period by which the awareness programmes educating the public about Zika virus needs to be completed. However such stipulations are lacking in the guidelines issued and therefore to a large extent it fails to express in action the urgency the current situation demands.

Do we need to improve our vector management policies?

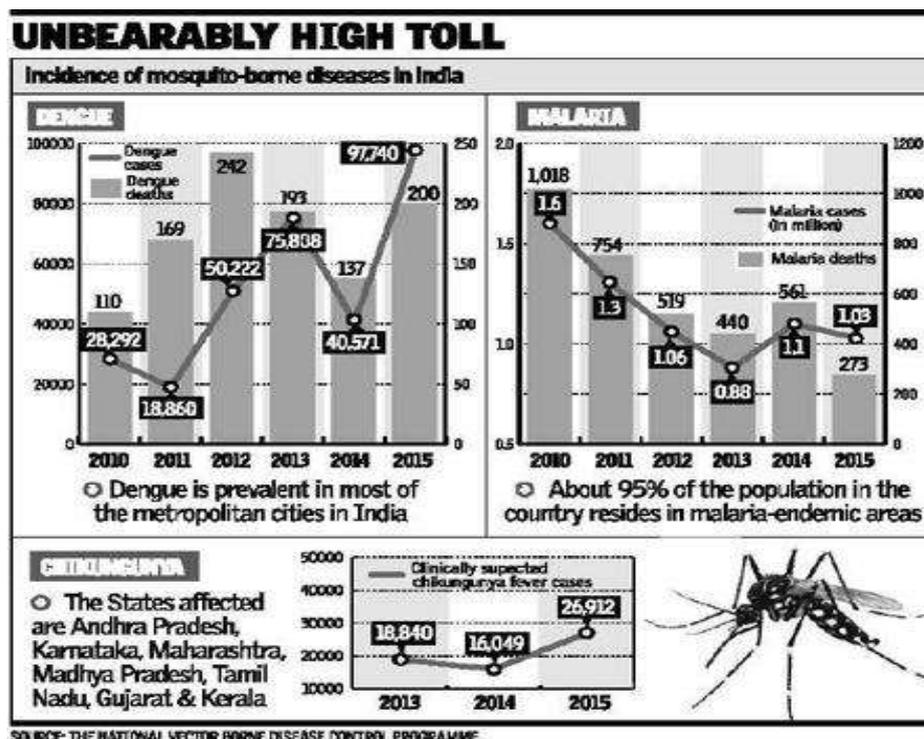
Each dengue season guidelines are issued, advertisements are put up to make general public more aware and yet this disease has not even been close to being under control. Since the same species of mosquito is responsible for spreading

¹ See FN 3

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dengue and Zika virus, it is important to understand how this government has dealt with controlling the vector last year and whether there is a need to improve the vector management policies.

Realising that some parts of India do have geographical disadvantage when it comes to breeding of mosquitoes especially the states closer to the tropics, the government should have invested in putting in place very stringent mosquito control measures. Because of a lack of these measures many parts of the country witnessed a massive outbreak of dengue in 2015. It is not shocking to find stagnant pools of water, open septic tank, poor sanitary conditions, ill-equipped sewage system, inadequate methods of waste disposal even today; all of which serve as breeding grounds for mosquitoes and diseases. The government's answer to all of this was the widely publicised Swachh Bharat Campaign which promised cleanliness, ergo less breeding of mosquitoes; but that has too fallen short in rectifying all these problems. (Nair 2015)



The graph represents the number of cases reported for Dengue, Malaria and Chikungunya, all mosquito-borne diseases.²

The guidelines issued by the MoHFW for Integrated Vector Management of Aedes mosquito³ released as answer to the pressing concerns of threat from Zika virus; is similar to (if not the same as) the guidelines issued for Integrated Vector Management for Control of Dengue/ Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever.⁴ Since both the diseases have quite a few similarities like the same vector, same symptoms and the lack of a vaccine this overlap of guidelines is not misrepresentative. But the question that we need to ask ourselves is has the government come up with any out of the box strategy to prevent the spread of Zika virus? This concern particularly emanates from the fact that it is difficult to differentiate Zika virus disease and dengue on the basis of their symptoms. But if the former spreads it will have a much more prolonged consequence whose burden will have to be borne by the next generation. In light of this fact the attitude of the government to produce a policy plan keeping in mind the gravity of the situation is seen lacking.

² "Moving in for the Kill", <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/moving-in-for-the-kill/article8195570.ecce>, The Hindu, February 5, 2016. Accessed on 5.2.2016

³ <http://www.mohfw.nic.in/showfile.php?lid=3706>, accessed on 5.2.2016

⁴ http://nvbdcp.gov.in/Doc/dengue_1_.%20Director_Desk%20DGHS%20meeting%20OCT%2006.pdf, accessed on 5.2.2016

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The ever increasing cases of dengue in the past year has brought to light the fact that usual vector management policies are not enough for dealing with the menace that these diseases create. Since improvement in the sphere of urban planning and related fields is a longer process, it would be wise to introduce some novel methods to control the Aedes mosquito along side; since it has been the main culprit for both these diseases.

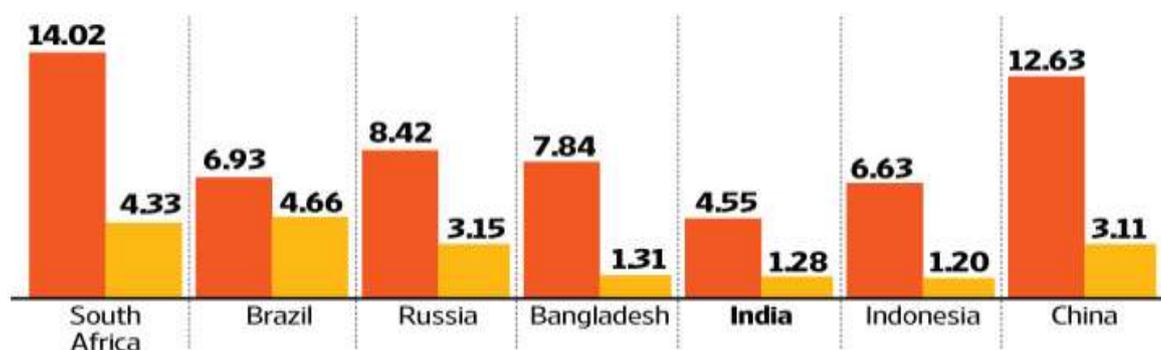
The MoHFW has not yet discussed any aggressive measure to control the population of Aedes mosquito. Brazil that is currently suffering from the epidemic of Zika virus has already begun experimenting with introducing genetically modified mosquito that can inhibit the growth of its own species. (Zika Could Have Catastrophic Effects 2016) Another new approach already tried in the northern Australian city of Cairns is to block transmission of dengue by reduction of multiplication of the dengue virus inside the mosquito's body. (Prasad 2016) Since India is a tropical country it needs to realise that effective mosquito control measures are required. Only preventing their breeding will not be enough to deal with such diseases which have the potential to spread wide and have grave consequences.

Do we need to better equip our healthcare system?

Policies to prevent diseases should not be emerging in spurts as and when global and national attention focuses on a particular disease. Rather these policies are evidence of sustained efforts in preventing and controlling the spread of diseases. The National Health Profile 2015 is a grim reminder of the dismal state of health care in India. For a population of 1.26 billion, India has 20,306 hospitals and 675,000 beds, less than a third of which are in villages, which are home to 70% of the population. Across India, there is one government hospital bed for 1,833 people. It is still considered a non-productive expenditure to invest in healthcare with no dividend to reap. (India's Healthcare System in the Sick Bay 2015).

NO COUNTRY FOR SICK PEOPLE

■ Govt health expenditure as a percentage of budget
■ Govt health expenditure as a percentage of GDP



Source: WHO National Health Accounts Global Health Expenditure Database

The graph depicts how less the government spends on the public health expenditure in India as compared to other countries.⁵

Its public awareness programs and vector management system particularly in context of combating the Zika virus are not up to the mark. Undeniably India needs to overhaul its healthcare system. Even though United States is in a much

⁵ "Seven Charts That Show Why India's Healthcare System Needs an Overhaul", <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/qXD81719wXXDQVpGyyARrO/Seven-charts-that-show-why-Indias-healthcare-system-needs-a.html>, The Livemint, December 15, 2015. Accessed on 5.2.2016

Headlines

better position as compared to affected countries in Latin America and India it has declared a near war like situation against the Zika virus disease. Its less dense neighbourhoods that usually use screens on windows in the houses and sophisticated public health apparatus equipped to monitor potential outbreaks and provide medical services if need be; make it very competent to handle a Zika virus disease epidemic. (Kayyem 2016) However India does not have these advantages and is in a more likely position to be effected by the Zika virus disease on a large scale should even a very small number of people get infected. Although the MoHFW has taken action against Zika virus disease, it still requires more concerted efforts from this government. Not only that India's public health care system is not adequately equipped to monitor the spread of diseases at a rapid scale. Not only should prevention be a cause of concern for MoHFW but also an agenda that requires immediate action since our public health systems are not capable of handling such an outbreak.

If the name Zika virus disease is set aside for a moment we would realise that its causes- rampant mosquito population and unhygienic conditions- are those which India has been battling since a long time. As globalisation makes inroads in the spread of diseases as well, public health care cannot still be viewed as a dole given out by a welfare state. A tiny slip in health care policies has the potential to hamper the economy of the country in addition to causing grave human loss.

Prepared By:
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Headlines

Victory for farmers: Why the govt was forced to backtrack on GM mustard

(Nihar Gokhale, *Catchnews*, February 06, 2016)

Union Environment Minister Mr. Prakash Javadekar finally agreed to re-consider its government decision to introduction of GM mustard seed. Mr. Javadekar said that the government will not approve the GM variety without consulting the public. “This comes as a victory not just to anti-GM activists but also farmers organisations across political lines who have strongly objected to introducing GM mustard, and the way the government was going about it.”

Read more: <http://www.catchnews.com/environment-news/victory-for-farmers-why-the-govt-was-forced-to-backtrack-on-gm-mustard-1454732520.html>

Date Accessed: 8.02.2015

MGNREGA: Fund Crunch in 14 States

(Vikas Vasudeva, *The Hindu*, February 03, 2016)

Ten years ago the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) ushered in a paradigm shift in the development of the nation and there have been several significant achievements over the past decade, yet, certain issues in implementation remain.

Social activists Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey, associated with the People’s Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) on Tuesday said: “Ten years of the MGNREGA should have been a time for celebration. However, the anniversary is marked by a continuing struggle for the release of funds.”

“We were expecting the Finance Minister to announce the release of at least Rs. 3,000 crore — the balance of the amount promised in his budget speech. However, this announcement was not made, and today the MGNREGA faces a negative balance of funds in 14 States,” they said.

The Finance Minister had, in his budget speech in February 2015, promised an additional Rs. 5,000 crore, and though the funds with the Ministry of Rural Development have depleted, only Rs. 2,000 crore of the Rs. 5,000 crore have been released.

The inability to provide money required as per work demand is a blatant violation of law, the activists said.

Read More: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mgnrega-scheme-fund-crunch-in-14-states/article8184914.ece>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2016

Economy

Why the 75% Drop in Global Oil Prices Isn't Reaching You

(Abhishek Waghmare and Indiaspend.Org, *TheWire*, 6 February, 2016)

Record production in the United States (US), weakened demand from the Eurozone and emerging economies like China and Brazil, and Iran's entry into the international market have effectively slashed the price of crude oil for India, from \$106 per barrel in July 2014 to \$26 in January 2016 — a 75% drop over 15 months. So, why are you not seeing evidence of this price-cut at your local petrol and diesel station? The answer: As global crude prices reach a 11-year low, the Centre and state governments steadily increase excise duties and value-added tax, shoring up their revenues and keeping fuel prices high for retail consumers.

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/02/06/why-the-75-drop-in-global-oil-prices-isnt-reaching-you-20964/>

Date Accessed 08.02.2016

Government Should Defend Real Growth Figures

(*Business Standard*, January 20, 2016)

It has befuddled many that the government, particularly its leading policy economists, are acting as if the stable and moderately high seven per cent-plus real growth in gross domestic product or GDP is obvious to all. However many, if not most, small and large businesses are complaining of a growth slowdown that has impacted the way they have been doing business in the last few months. By not directly addressing this data-perception anomaly, the government and its chief data czars are doing themselves - and India - a disservice.

Read more: http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/silence-over-data-116012001193_1.html

Date Accessed: 21.1.2016

Governance & Development

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Ending Open Defecation

(Rahul Jacob, *Business Standard*, January 20, 2016)

Those households in India that have new toilets often tend not to use them. Late last year, a national survey showed that less than half of the toilets built in the Swachh Bharat mission are being used for defecation, but doing duty instead as small granaries or as store rooms. The issue is deathly serious because widespread open defecation in India often leads to contamination of the water supply. In turn, repeated bouts of diarrhoea suffered by many toddlers in India contribute to high numbers of children dying before they reach the age of five and malnutrition and impaired learning abilities among those who survive.

Read more: http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/rahul-jacob-ending-open-defecation-116012001221_1.html

Date Accessed: 21.1.2016

EC Asks Govt to Allow Use of Device to Enhance Voter Secrecy

(*Free Press Journal*, January 21, 2016)

To stop victimization, decimation and intimidation of electors, the Election Commission has asked the government to amend electoral rule to allow it to introduce a new device to enhance secrecy of vote during counting. It will help in maintaining confidentiality of voting pattern. As per existing rules, votes in the electronic voting machines (EVMs) are to be counted polling station-wise, which leads to situations where voting patterns in various localities or pockets become known to everyone.

Read more: <http://www.freepressjournal.in/ec-asks-govt-to-allow-use-of-device-to-enhance-voter-secrecy/>

Date Accessed: 21.1.2015

Govt Approves Hybrid Annuity Model for Highway Projects

(*The Hindu*, January 27, 2016)

The government on Wednesday approved hybrid annuity model for building roads to fast-track highway projects, revive the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) mode and attract more investments in the sector. "The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has given its approval for the Hybrid Annuity Model as one of the modes of delivery for implementing the Highway Projects," said a statement from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. Under this model, the government will provide 40 per cent of the project cost to the developer to start work while the remaining investment has to be made by the developer.

Read more: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/govt-approves-hybrid-annuity-model-for-highway-projects/article8158108.ece>

Date accessed: 27.01.16

HEALTH

Priorities for India's National Health Policy

(*Brookings India*, December 2015)

One of India's fundamental failings as a modern nation has been our inability to get successive governments to prioritize and deal with public goods. Public goods (as against private goods) have non-rival and non-excludable consumption which makes pricing difficult. This in turn makes their provision through the market mechanism tricky and hence they have to be provided by the government. In this latest paper it is argued that India's health policy needs to focus more on delivering those aspects of healthcare which are public or quasi-public goods, and on regulating and thus facilitating market provision of those aspects that provide private benefits.

Read more: <http://www.brookings.in/in-focus/priorities-for-indias-national-health-policy/>

Date Accessed: 21.1.2016

Governance & Development

Many Indian Children, Mothers Healthier Than Ever: NFHS 4

(Prachi Salve, *India Spend*, January 21, 2016)

NFHS 4 data of 13 states and 2 Union Territory released by Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare revealed significant improvement in maternal and child health in last one decade (2005-06 to 2015). According to the latest data over this decade, rising female literacy, later marriages, the ability to take financial decisions, better healthcare, cooking facilities and water supply are among the reasons why Indian mothers and children are living longer.

Read more: <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/many-indian-children-mothers-healthier-than-ever-latest-data-87036>

Date Accessed: 21.1.2015

ENERGY

Cabinet Clears Plan to Auction Coal for Non-Power Sectors

(Krishna N. Das, *Reuters*, February 03, 2016)

The cabinet has cleared a proposal to auction coal to non-power sectors like steel, iron and cement, Coal Secretary Anil Swarup told Reuters, ending the past practice of selective allocation and potentially raising costs for users.

State-controlled Coal India Ltd. will put up a quarter of its production for auction to non-power companies following Wednesday's decision by the cabinet, which was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

But companies that had long-term fuel contracts with Coal India will continue to get supplies until their term expires.

"The aim is to remove discretion," said Swarup, who has also been instrumental in auctioning coal mines to private companies.

India has launched a round of auctions of mines so that private firms can extract coal for their own use, after the Supreme Court in August 2014 cancelled more than 200 illegal coal block awards made over two decades.

Read More: <http://www.reuters.com/article/india-coal-auction-idUSKCN0VC0K2>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2016

ENVIRONMENT

India's Monsoons: A Change in the Rain

(Grace Boyle, *Al Jazeera*, February 02, 2016)

The Western Ghats are not typically given as an example of climate change in action. There are no cracked desert soils here. But changes have already been observed and are all the more alarming for their occurrence in such a complex and rich ecosystem.

"A lot of climate change has already happened," says RK Chaturvedi, a researcher at the Divecha Centre for Climate Change at the India Institute of Science in Bangalore, who has been studying the Western Ghats.

"Research says rainfall is declining over the Western Ghats - and declining quite a bit. It differs in different places, but over the Western Ghats, as a whole, there is a decline. That has been happening over the past 30 to 40 years. Kerala is really bearing the brunt of the situation, experiencing the largest of these declines. But it doesn't make headlines."

Future predictions of climate change are made by mathematical modelling, and on a national scale these models are fairly robust: everyone knows temperatures will generally increase. But we still lack a lot of understanding in the finer details, and relatively few research groups are working on the effects of climate change in the Western Ghats, despite the crucial importance of the region's biodiversity. The consequent effects on the flora, fauna and millions of people who depend on them - either directly as forest communities or on a wider scale due to the climatic systems it regulates - are also largely unknown. Ecosystems such as those in the Western Ghats are vastly complex, and the ripple effects of changes such as this can be difficult to tease apart.

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Read More: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/01/india-monsoons-change-rain-160124090758074.html>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2016

LAW AND JUSTICE

Dismantling Democracy: How the Supreme Court Deprived the Poor of Their Right to Fight Elections

(Talha Abdul Rahman & Zoheb Hossain, *The Huffington Post*, February 03, 2016)

The right to contest an election is a corollary to the right to vote -- two sides of a coin. A system of election can be called "fair" if and only if those who vote are equally entitled and free to contest, should they wish to. The right to vote has been acknowledged as an expression of the right to freedom of speech, and therefore the unqualified ability to contest an election is also a facet of freedom of speech and expression. The right to contest election can only be restricted to the extent of maintaining the fairness of the election - such as keeping criminals out. Since a democratic form of governance is a basic feature of the Constitution, it ought to follow that right to vote or contest election, even if provided by statutes is really in the realm of essential Constitutional rights. Absence or truncation of such rights would make the Constitution itself unworkable.

Unfortunately, while acknowledging that both the right to vote and the right to contest elections are constitutional rights and not statutory rights, simpliciter, the Court does not examine the implications of its findings, except to observe that every person who is entitled to be a voter by virtue of the scheme of the Constitution is not automatically entitled to contest in any of the elections to constitutional offices. Being a higher right, it is guaranteed stronger protection, but this analysis is found lacking in the judgment. With this judicial approval, other states are following suit.

The Supreme Court's judgment is divorced from the ground realities in India, where a large section of the population would fail to fulfil the criteria laid down by the law, thus depriving them of their valuable constitutional right to contest elections and thereby destroying any hope for a deliberative democracy.

Read More: http://www.huffingtonpost.in/talha-abdul-rahman-/dismantling-democracy-how_b_9137248.html?utm_hp_ref=india

Date Accessed: 03.02.2016

Hope Soars for LGBTs, But Tough Test Ahead

(Dhananjay Mahapatra, *The Times of India*, February 03, 2016)

A tough road lies ahead for the LGBT community despite it being euphoric over the Supreme Court's decision on Tuesday to refer to a five-judge bench a bunch of curative petitions seeking a fresh view on the SC's December 2013 judgment making gay sex a punishable offence under Section 377 of IPC.

The toughness of the legal path is mainly because of the narrow 'curative' jurisdiction created by the SC in its landmark 2002 judgment in Rupa Ashok Hurra case even after the dismissal of a petitioner's plea for review of an SC judgment.

The Supreme Court has given the LGBT community a ray of hope by referring the matter to a five-judge constitutional bench, but that still leaves it to the judiciary to interpret an obsolete law in a modern context. It would be far better for Parliament to stop ducking responsibility and amend the law to make gay sex between consenting adults legal. The Gandhis and other Congress leaders have come out in favour of LGBT rights as have AAP and the Left. Individual leaders from the BJP and RSS, including Arun Jaitley and Ram Madhav, have also said they support decriminalisation of gay sex. It's time for the ruling party to walk the talk.

Read More: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Hope-soars-for-LGBTs-but-tough-test-ahead/articleshow/50828721.cms>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2016

India's Anti-Narcotics Law is in Urgent Need of Rehab

(Neha Singhal and Sakshi, *The Wire*, 26th January, 2016)

Thirty years since the passage of the NDPS Act, the failure to do anything meaningful for the rehabilitation of drug addicts has led

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to the government and courts criminalising people in urgent need of medical assistance. There has been scant public or parliamentary discussion about the contradictory objectives of rehabilitation and deterrence that have rendered the statute ineffective.

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/01/26/indias-anti-narcotics-law-is-in-urgent-need-of-rehab-19907/>

Accessed on: 27.01.2016

Society

GENDER

Domestic Violence and Effectiveness of Law Enforcement Agencies: A Panel Data Study (*The Economic and Political Weekly*, January 16, 2016)

This study questions the efficacy of our legal and social institutions in providing them justice. It studies how legal and socio-cultural interventions have helped their quest for justice and try to unravel how police agencies and judiciary react to women reporting domestic violence. The study shows that police agencies as well as women in the police force, presumably employed to help women, have not only failed to help the victim of domestic violence, but also thwarted her efforts to seek justice. However, our study also shows that socio-cultural interventions like empowering women, restoring respect for women in society and reducing criminalisation of society enable them in obtaining justice.

Read more:

http://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2016_51/3/Domestic_Violence_and_Effectiveness_of_Law_Enforcement_Agencies_0.pdf

Date Accessed: 21.1.2016

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The World's Inequality Countdown (Winnie Byanyima, *Al Jazeera*, January 18, 2016)

There is a steep increase in the world's inequality countdown. In 2010, some 388 people owned as much wealth as the poorest half of the world's population. Jump to 2014 and that 388 is down to 85 people. In 2015 the figure was 80, and today Oxfam has revealed that 62 rich individuals own as much wealth as the poorest 3.6 billion people. If this deeply alarming inequality clock continues to tick as fast, by 2020 a mere 11 people could have the same wealth as half the world.

Read more: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/01/world-inequality-countdown-160118072153499.html>

Date Accessed: 21.1.2016

India and World

MIDDLE-EAST

Iran Sans Action

(K.P. Fabian, *The Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, January 18, 2016)

What might be the impact of Iran's re-entry into the comity of nations? It is true that only the nuclear-issue related sanctions have been lifted. Some US sanctions relating to sponsorship of terrorism and violation of human rights remain. Intriguingly enough, after suspending the nuclear-matter related sanctions, Obama has imposed fresh sanctions on Iran for violating a Security Council resolution on ballistic missiles testing. Incidentally, Obama delayed the announcement of the new sanctions till the Americans released under the prisoner-swap deal reached the US safely.

Read more: http://idsa.in/idsacomments/iran-sans-sanctions_kpfabian_180116

Date Accessed: 21.1.2016

Israel's Land Grab Violates International Law

(Amy Maguire, *The Wire*, 26th January, 2016)

Israel is preparing to make its largest land seizure in the West Bank since August 2014. Israeli settlers are already farming the 154 hectares in the Jordan Valley, displacing Palestinian communities. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on Israel to change its settlement policies. Settlements are illegal on occupied territory. They undermine the widely acknowledged right of Palestine to statehood. Yet Israel violates international law with near impunity.

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/01/25/israels-land-grab-violates-international-law-20147/>

Accessed on: 27.01.2016

Opinions/ Books

OPINIONS

The Scream of Lotus Buds

(Uttam Sengupta & Ushinor Majumdar, *Outlook*, February 08, 2016)

The student body of the RSS-BJP has been on an overdrive since the NDA government took charge in May 2014. It has taken on critics of the Modi government, often calling them anti-national, as, on one pretext or the other, it intervened to stop plays, films, seminars, festivals and lectures that challenged its views. Violence or threat of violence has been used with increasing frequency, but the police has generally looked the other way.

Set up in 1949, the ABVP has grown steadily over the years—with plenty of help from people in authority. That it is much more than a student body is indicated by the resources it has access to. Flush with funds, the ABVP is arguably the richest student body in the country. Its clout extends to interfering with and influencing decisions at the highest levels in government and at universities.

Of late, the ABVP has targeted ‘left-leaning intellectuals’ and ‘Naxalites’ as a threat to national security, flexing muscle when necessary. Strangely, the ABVP doesn’t seem to worry too much about the escalating fees in private colleges, inadequate hostel facilities, ill-equipped labs and badly stocked libraries. Instead, it loses no opportunity to raise issues related to terrorism, illegal immigration from Bangladesh, national security, Chinese intrusion, ‘love jihad’, live-in relationships, Indian family values etc.

But while the prime minister, BJP chief Amit Shah and HRD minister Smriti Irani pose for photographs with ABVP leaders and hold discussions with them, none of them has spared a word to rein it in or condemn its irresponsible behaviour. The ABVP is no longer just a bunch of campus bullies. It is morphing into something far more organic and sinister.

Read More: <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/the-scream-of-lotus-buds/296540>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2016

BOOKS

In the Shadow of the Rohingyas of Myanmar

(The Wire Staff, *The Wire*, 6 February, 2016)

In *Nowhere People*, Constantine visits stateless groups in twelve countries: from Italy and Ukraine, to the Ivory Coast and Nepal, bringing into view ‘the innocent people who are not tolerated by any state.’ This is the third in Constantine’s series on the stateless, following two prize-winning books on Kenyan’s Nubians and the Rohingyas. Both are groups he revisits in *Nowhere People*, which was selected by Mother Jones magazine as one of the 10 Best Photo Books of 2015.

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/02/06/in-the-shadow-of-the-rohingyas-of-myanmar-20988/>

Accessed on 08.02.2016

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