

In This Issue

Dear Reader,

This week's Cover Story raises the crucial issue of India's Climate Policy. While India has traditionally taken the stand that the cause of economic development must be given primacy over climate change negotiations, it may no longer be a viable stand for us to take. Very clearly, clean air is no longer a "luxury" meant for developed countries alone and the debate around these policies and their implementation is increasingly being forced into the mainstream in countries like ours. If, as the Union Health Minister recently told Parliament, more than 11% of Delhiites suffer from asthma and rhinitis, then climate change and its impact has crept into our lives and these discussions can no longer be consigned to the realms of esoteric international debate. The facts are scary and must be articulated clearly to all stakeholders so that we can take tough, but appropriate decisions as a nation – while we still can! For example, today coal fired thermal plants produce more than 60% of India's power and despite our commitment to green energy this figure is likely to go up over the next few years – since India is also home to some of the world's 'dirtiest' power plants it may be time for us to take a leaf out of President Obama's Clean Power Plan, declare a 'War on Coal' and demand funding and research for clean fuel! We hope that this week's Cover Story gives you a brief overview of the various contentious issues, like funding, public accountability and political obstacles, that form a part of this complicated but critical debate on Climate Change.

The 2012 ILO report on global employment brought out some very interesting figures on India's urban female work-force participation rate (WPR). Despite the fact that the "number of women seeking or available for work increased more than eight-fold, from 1.8 million in 1991 to 15.5 million in 2011", at a mere 15%, we rank 11th from the bottom in the global WPR rankings. While these figures are a cause for concern, it is more important to note that these figures also indicate that we could have had 55% more women in the workforce if these 15.5 million women could have found appropriate jobs. While the government's skill development initiatives will help some of these women find jobs, clearly we need to do a lot more in the area social norms, education levels, access to credit to improve employment sought by and available to women.

Finally, a news item that should raise the hackles of all right thinking citizens– a government job portal recently launched by Prime Minister Modi seeks to promote the hiring of manual scavengers and under the "Sweeper, Wet" description even lists a "key competency" of removing "night soil using spade and broom." Not only is employing individuals in these jobs punishable under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, the site adds insult to injury as the profile of a "Safai Karamchhari" and a "scavenger" is listed as being "mildly hazardous or dangerous" clearly ignoring the devastating loss of dignity faced by the latter and the high incidence of "lung, respiratory, neurological diseases, infection, biological diseases, suffocation, fatigue" among Safai Karamchhari's!

We hope that our Cover Story and some of the policy related news that we have highlighted in this issue of Policy Watch will result in wider and more informed debate and as always look forward to your feedback.

Ms. Barkha Deva
Associate Director

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Cover Story

Indian climate policy: Are we doing enough?

Ahead of the upcoming landmark Conference of Parties (COP – 21) in Paris in December 2015, India’s position will be under close scrutiny by the domestic as well as the international community. Being the third largest emitter of carbon dioxide, India owes a critical responsibility to the global community to engage in greenhouse gas reductions, both substantively as well as symbolically. Historically, India’s position in the international climate negotiations has been shaped by the development and justice arguments. With about 289 million people living below the poverty line¹ and a rapidly rising population, India’s long-held position in the United Nations climate change negotiations has been that it cannot afford to compromise with its economic development priorities by leaving its vast sections of economically vulnerable population in a lurch.

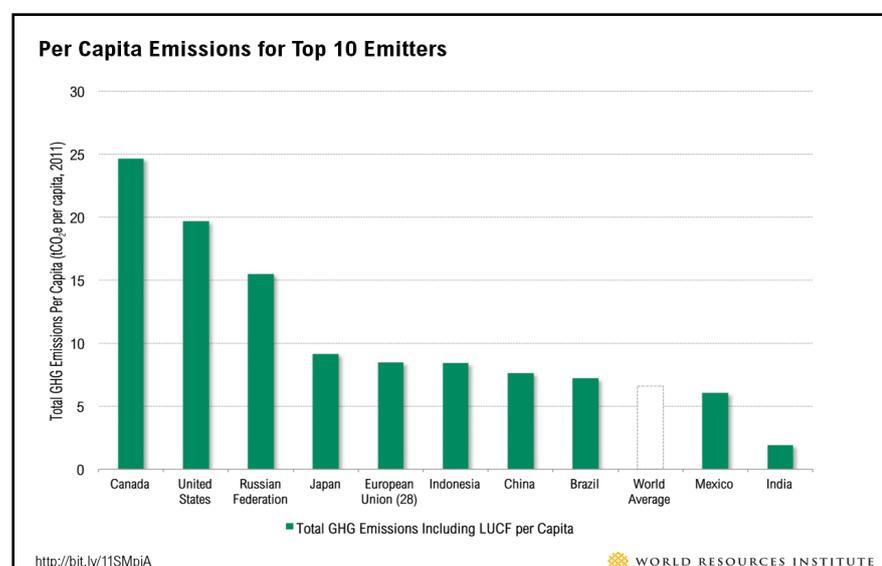
Underlying this argument is the rationale that the atmospheric carbon space needs to be justly appropriated by the countries, based on considerations of justice and equity, as set forth in the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDRRCs). There are two main arguments India has put forward to undergird its position. First, historically, since the developed countries have appropriated massive amounts of carbon space in order to develop, they cannot now claim an equal share of it vis-a-vis the developing countries. Second, presently, the distribution of emission rights should be determined in accordance with the nature of emissions, that is, the survival emissions of the developing countries versus the luxury emissions of the developed world².

India’s position on climate change:

India’s apparently recalcitrant position in the climate change debate needs to be understood in the context of a variety of complex domestic factors that structure its political economy and its staunch support of the principles of equity and responsibility in the trade-offs demanded by the global climate policy context.

The two factors that India, along with the rest of the developing world, supports are based on allocating responsibility for climate change in accordance with the principle of equity based on historic responsibilities.

Another argument that has underpinned the Indian position has been that the principle of CBDRRC requires that responsibilities for emissions be allocated in terms of per capita emissions which reflect the real state of grassroots economic development in a country. These per capita emissions substantiate well the idea of ‘survival emissions’ that are often necessary to the growing populations of developing countries. In per capita terms, India has the one of the lowest emissions trajectory:



¹ World Bank n.d.

² Agarwal and Narain 1991

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While these principles continue to form the core of climate policy in India, more detailed changes began to take place after 2007, when India began to participate, outside of the UNFCCC, in the G8+5 forum or the Major Economies Forum, through which the developed and the large developing countries mobilized support for the voluntary pledge-and-review system agreed upon at Copenhagen in 2009. These voluntary pledges provided considerable leeway to the major emitters like the US (though the EU didn't agree with the system), and also led India to accordingly re-shape its climate policy, through the adoption of a co-benefits approach as detailed in the National Action Plan on Climate Change³, whereby it sought to frame the development-climate trade-off in such a way as would not compromise its developmental objectives and yet ensure its contribution to the global negotiations.

India's climate policy has, thus, been shaped largely in accordance with the wider global positions adopted in the international negotiations. Unfortunately, this focus on the global normative positions has largely compromised India's own domestic targets and what it could do to substantively reduce emissions.

This is clear from the dismal implementation status of domestic climate action plans:

Funds Earmarked and Utilization under Climate Change Action Programme in India (2012-2017)		
(Rs. in Crore)		
Activities	Total Funds Earmarked during the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP)	Total Funds Utilized during the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP)
Coordination of National Action Plan on Climate Change	0.65	0.00
State Action Plan on Climate Change	90.00	0.00
National Institute For Climate Change Studies & Actions	25.00	0.74
National Carbonaceous Aerosols Programme	84.00	1.32
Long Term Ecological Observatories for Climate Change Studies	40.00	0.02
Coordinated Studies on Climate Change for North Eastern Region	5.00	0.00
International Negotiations & Contributions	24.00	2.35
Capacity Building	16.00	0.03
Other Administrative and Foreign Travels	5.35	4.45
Total	290.00	8.906

Source: *Indiastat*⁴

The very evident gap between the allocation and utilization of funds mobilized for climate action shows that the Indian state clearly needs to walk the talk on its commitments to tackle climate change. Given India's clear normative position in global negotiations and its parallel inaction at the domestic level, it is clear that there is a dual reason for India's climate policy paralysis:

First, India lacks a clear global position which can match its domestic demand agenda at the grassroots level. Accepting the principles of equity and CBDR is in excellent stead, but it is no longer sufficient to say that commitments to combating climate change should be seen in the vague context of developmental outcomes, without specifying a methodology and timeframe to achieve them through set climate policy goals in the areas of mitigation, adaptation and sustainable development.

Second, as a corollary of the earlier point, there is a remarkable lack of coordination between national level plans and their local level counterparts, till date. As will be seen in the later sections, such a failure amounts to nothing but rhetoric in climate policy.

The new government's climate policy priorities:

³ Dubash, et al. 2013; Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change n.d.

⁴ Indiastat n.d.

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The Modi government has taken an overt and aggressive position on tackling climate change. Besides announcing a slew of highly publicized measures by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, the government has engaged in a dual political strategy to reinforce its credibility globally viz. through political rhetoric and through signing climate pacts to ensure that there is greater investment in promoting climate-friendly technologies.

However, whether the government is actually moving beyond political rhetoric to walk the talk on climate change remains a contested issue. That the government's action lags far behind its policy rhetoric becomes clear both through its international positions as well as through the status of its domestic policy initiatives.

At the international level, the period that followed after the COP –20 negotiations at Lima was marked by a lot of substantive overtures by the Indian government in the field of climate policy. India took an overt position on climate policy through initiatives like signing the climate cooperation agreement with the US during the US President's Obama visit in January 2015, launching new missions in the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and taking a position on the phase-out of the HFCs (Hydrofluorocarbons) whereby India changed its long-standing objection to including HFCs under the governance of the Montreal Protocol which was vastly successful in ensuring the phase-out of ozone-depleting substances viz. CFCs (Chlorofluorocarbons) and HCFCs (Hydrochlorofluorocarbons)⁵. Moreover, the government also took a clear position on the submission of the individual national action plans on tackling climate change, also known as the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), by averring that all countries should come up with a comprehensive climate action plan.

On the face of it, all these initiatives signal the government's clear intent to contribute to combat climate change and to cooperate with the international community in doing so. Yet, the catch evident in all these initiatives is now becoming increasingly evident.

Table: National climate policy initiatives by the government since 2014

Policy	Target	Substance	Current status
National Adaptation Fund	In 2014, an allocation of 100 crore rupees and 2015 an allocation of 150 crore rupees was announced for this newly-setup fund.	The fund is supposed to meet the costs of adaptation to climate change faced by the central and state governments.	Fund is yet to be operationalized.
Increasing investment in renewable energy	Mobilizing the renewable energy capacity up to 100 GW solar energy, 60 GW wind energy, 10 GW biomass and 5 GW hydropower, by as early as 2022.	Power sector is one of the biggest sources of carbon dioxide emissions in India. These measures signal the intent to mobilize renewable energy resources to meet electricity demands.	No clear implementation roadmap in place.
Coal cess	In Budget 2015, India doubled the coal cess from 100 rupees a tonne to 200 rupees a tonne.	The receipts from the coal cess go to the National Clean Energy Fund, which disburses grants for clean energy projects. It has collected about 2.76 billion USD by now.	Despite the substantial amount of money with the Fund, the substantive disbursement to clean energy projects has yet to be seen.
Disaster management funding	Funding for disaster management has been doubled to around 61,000 crore rupees.	In the past year alone, the government funded several disaster management initiatives in the wake of Cyclone Hudhud, Kashmir floods and losses due to unseasonal monsoon.	This funding is clearly insufficient in the light of the frequency with which disasters have started to occur and the massive individual costs in every disaster.

⁵ HFCs are listed as greenhouse gases under the UNFCCC and their contribution to greenhouse gas emissions are equivalent to 1000 metric tons of carbon dioxide (World Bank n.d.), thereby making them highly potent greenhouse gases.

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Announcement of 4 new missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).	In 2014, the government announced four new missions under the NAPCC viz. Wind Energy, Human Health, Coastal Resources and Waste-to-Energy.	Each of these missions seeks to engage in assessment, monitoring and implementation impacts of climate change in the listed sectors.	The missions have only been visualized –they are yet to be implemented.
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Source: Data taken from Down to Earth. Table compiled by author.

Future of climate action in India:

Given the state of disconnect between India's global policy position on climate change and the lack of action back home, there is mounting noise on clarifying India's domestic climate policy as well as international stance.

However, by and large, the policy focus of the government is focused on research and funding for adaptation and less on articulating a clear position to mobilize public knowledge and outreach on climate change. So far, the measures are largely institutional, with even the funds earmarked for adaptation not being utilized optimally, as is clear from this analysis.

It is important to note that internationally there seems to be a change in the narrative around issues like air quality policy from being regarded purely an environmental issue and a concern of environmental ministries to an important health issue which impacts the public. To this effect, the WHO passed a resolution⁶ recognizing the health impacts of air pollution, resulting in 7 million deaths each year⁷, from both indoor and outdoor air pollution. As a result of this WHO action, "policy makers are moving away from clean air as a luxury and embracing the idea that clean air is a necessary part of poverty reduction and economic growth. There is growing realization among policy makers that issues of air quality management are not merely aesthetic."⁸

In keeping with this global trend it is important for us to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the issues at stake and arrive at a common understanding as far as the government's stand on climate change policies are concerned, and there is an urgent need to incorporate the following into the public discourse:

- Environment is more than an instrumental sphere.
- Public accountability and impact assessment of funds earmarked under climate action plans. Mobilization of public around the domain of climate is as crucial as that around other fundamental issues like land.
- 'Political obstacles' to the success of climate change mitigation policies need to be addressed, by interventions like power sector reform and abolishing subsidies on harmful fertilizers and polluting fuel (Chatterjee, Death and Pereira 2013).

Last but not the least, preservation of all natural ecosystems, including the linkage with climate, is linked to histories and culture of communities that have evolved under them. Unless these are mobilized through the public discourse, there will be little headway in consolidating a country-wide and inclusive policy for the climate.

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⁶ World Health Organization 2015.

⁷ World Health Organization 2014.

⁸ Sanchez-Triana 2015.

Headlines

Urban India and its Female Demographic Dividend

(Shriya Anand and Jyothi Koduganti, *Indiaspend*, July 30, 2015)

The growth in the urban female workforce is characterised by two trends: (i) more than 60% of urban females are a part of the informal sector, (ii) unemployment is the highest among urban females with graduate degrees and above, with an unemployment rate of 15.7%, much higher than other demographic groups.

Read More: <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/urban-india-and-its-female-demographic-dividend-58841>

Date Accessed: 30.07.2015

Government Job Portal lists Manual Scavenging as ‘Career Option’

(Mohit M.Rao, *The Hindu*, August 4, 2015)

Narendra Modi-led NDA government’s idea to bring employers and job seekers on a single platform is now promoting and allowing the hiring of the prohibited act of manual scavenging. Cleaning of sewers, descending into manholes, removing night-soil (human excreta) using a broom find a place in the National Career Services portal that was launched recently as a part of Skill India. For instance, under the ‘unorganised sector’ panel of the website, a “Sweeper, Sewer” is “expected to” clean sewage systems by “using various cleaning instruments,” including bamboo or iron rod, and collecting debris and refuse in a bucket using a spade and handing this bucket to “helper outside manhole.”

Read more: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/govt-job-portal-lists-manual-scavenging-as-career-option/article7499117.ece?utm_source=MostCommented&utm_medium=Homepage&utm_campaign=WidgetPromo

Date Accessed: 05.08.2015

Economy

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

States	Rural	Urban	General
All India	6.25	4.76	5.40
Northern Region			
Jammu & Kashmir	8.38	4.22	6.71
Himachal Pradesh	11.49	3.66	9.51
Punjab	9.29	6.70	8.07
Chandigarh	16.05	0.27	1.03
Uttarakhand	5.18	4.13	6.35
Haryana	7.57	6.69	7.88
Delhi	9.22	5.52	8.40
Uttar Pradesh	4.23	3.94	6.58
Western Region			
Rajasthan	7.23	7.30	5.02
Gujarat	4.64	5.36	5.03
Maharashtra	8.63	4.74	6.25
Goa	6.56	8.91	7.29
Lakshadweep	17.17	4.85	10.99
Daman & Die	17.83	10.47	14.45
Dadra Nagar & Haveli	21.50	7.69	15.19
Central Region			
Madhya Pradesh	5.60	5.89	5.56
Chattishgarh	12.58	4.64	9.17
Southern Region			
Andhra Pradesh	10.12	6.34	8.39
Karnakata	8.76	3.73	6.13
Kerala	6.58	3.53	5.34
Tamil Nadu	5.64	4.99	5.44
Puducherry	17.55	9.06	11.74
Andaman & Nicobar Island	10.63	2.76	6.67
Northeastern Region			
Arunachal Pradesh	6.60		
Assam	5.31	2.62	4.23
Manipur	20.95	5.88	15.17
Meghalaya	-3.54	6.59	-2.29
Mizoram	3.91	2.83	3.05
Nagaland	12.54	5.46	9.34
Tripura	8.46	6.47	7.48
Sikkim	9.94	1.87	8.66
Eastern Region			
Bihar	4.88	3.31	-0.10
Jharkhand	5.38	3.49	4.24
West Bengal	0.04	3.48	1.41
Odisha	9.46	2.75	7.13

- 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 is introduced with base 2012=100) provided by MOSPI, Government of India.
- The 2014 June 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.

Economy

Private Sector Banks See an Uptick in Bad Loans in Q1

(Nupur Anand, *Business Standard*, August 4, 2015)

Like Public sector banks, most private sector lenders including HDFC Bank, Axis Bank, YES Bank, Federal Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank have also reported an increase in non-performing assets (NPAs). As expected by the analyst, Private banks' earnings in the first quarter (April-June) of 2015-16 were hit. The lenders witnessed slight pressure in asset quality in the first quarter.

Read more: http://www.business-standard.com/article/finance/private-sector-banks-see-an-uptick-in-bad-loans-in-q1-115080400059_1.html

Date Accessed: 4.8.2015

Narendra Modi Gets a Reality Check as India Investment Fails to Take Off

(*Livemint*, August 5, 2015)

Growth in investments has failed to take off as companies are reluctant to boost spending despite falling interest rates and Modi's pro-business rhetoric. New project proposals announced in the three months through June were the lowest since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took power in May 2014. The numbers bolster the case for a further reduction in interest rates by the RBI.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/pHkvSwkufKBwcbiFGCoqjP/Narendra-Modi-gets-a-reality-check-as-India-investment-fails.html>

Date accessed: 05.08.15

RBI Keeps Policy Rates on Hold at 7.25%

(*Business world*, August 5, 2015)

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept its policy rate on hold at 7.25 per cent on Tuesday (04 August), as widely expected, while leaving the door open to ease further depending on the inflation outlook and how swiftly banks lower their lending rates. The central bank also said government economic reforms and the timing of any increase in US interest rates would be key factors that will determine whether the RBI cuts rates for a fourth time this year.

Read more: <http://www.businessworld.in/economy-india-policy-banking-finance-banking/expert-views-i-rbi-keeps-policy-rates-hold-725#sthash.oUSunyUF.dpbs>

Date Accessed: 05.08.2015

Governance and Development

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Citizenship Soon for those who Fled Religious Persecution

(Nistula Hebbar, *The Hindu*, August 5, 2015)

In a move that will have far-reaching implications in Assam and some parts of north-west India, the Union Home Ministry will amend the Citizenship Act, 1955, to grant citizenship to undocumented migrants who fled religious persecution in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Read more: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/citizenship-soon-for-those-who-fled-religious-persecution/article7500491.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 05.08.2015

GOVERNMENT

Land Bill: Government Capitulates on Social Impact, Consent Clauses

(*Business Standard*, August 4, 2015)

The provisions of social impact consent clauses which were part of United Progressive Alliance government's 2013 Land Act, were excluded from land Bill ordinance, promulgated at the end of December 2014 and re-promulgated thrice after that, arguing that these clauses made the 2013 Act cumbersome are expected to come back. On Monday, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members of a parliamentary joint committee on the Bill suggested amendments that effectively bring back the social impact assessment and consent clauses, hallmarks of the United Progressive Alliance government's 2013 Act. The present government is set to relent on the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

Read more: http://www.business-standard.com/article/politics/land-bill-govt-capitulates-on-social-impact-consent-clauses-115080400052_1.html

Date Accessed: 4.8.2015

Idle Generators in the Midst of Power Deficit

(*Indiatogether*, August 4, 2015)

Southern India is expected to face a severe electricity shortage this year. The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) in its latest annual forecast anticipates the energy deficit in the southern electricity grid to be over 11 %, equivalent to a generation capacity deficit of 4000MW. For Karnataka and Telangana, the forecasted energy deficit is greater than 16%.

Read more: <http://indiatogether.org/the-electricity-conundrum-economy>

Date Accessed: 05.08.2015

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EXCLUSION

Government Mulls Social Security Net for Domestic Help

(*Free Press Journal*, August 08, 2015)

“The Labour Ministry is working on a new policy framework to provide social security coverage to domestic help and a proposal in this regard would be moved to Cabinet soon, an official said.”

Read more: <http://www.freepressjournal.in/govt-mulls-social-security-net-for-domestic-help/>

Date Accessed: 9.8.2015

Governance and Development

EDUCATION

Research Supervision Only by Own Teachers: UGC

(*The Deccan Chronicle*, August 4, 2015)

Dealing a severe blow to the research activities in higher educational institutions in the state, the UGC has issued a circular insisting that only regular teachers under the same universities are authorised to supervise research within the same university.

Read more: <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/150804/nation-education/article/research-supervision-only-own-teachers-ugc>

Date Accessed: 5.8.2015

The Public Education System and What the Costs Imply

(Kiran Bhatta, Anuradha De, and Rathin Roy, *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 1, 2015)

There are basic methodological and conceptual problems with recent research that ends up arguing that private school education is more effective than public education. Such findings have obvious policy implications but it is critical that research that informs policy is based on a correct reading of facts, keeping the larger vision of education in mind.

Read More: <http://www.epw.in/commentary/public-education-system-and-what-costs-imply.html>

Date Accessed: 03.08.2015

TECHNOLOGY

Government Does Volte Face on Porn Ban: Tells Supreme Court It Can't Play Nanny in Every Household

(Rituparna Chatterjee, *Huffington Post India*, August 10, 2015)

The government has told the Supreme Court that although it wanted a ban on websites peddling child pornography, it could not play the role of moral police and be present in every household to check what people are watching in private, according to reports. The government last week began a massive and unprecedented ban on pornographic websites, supplying internet companies with a list of more than 850 websites that need to be denied access to. But within days the government reversed its order, the department of telecom withdrawing the list of 857 websites it had asked internet service providers to ban.

Read More: http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/08/10/india-porn-ban_n_7964202.html?utm_hp_ref=india

Date Accessed: 11.08.2015

ENVIRONMENT

India Gets First Data from its Arctic Moored Observatory

(*Livemint*, August 5, 2015)

India has, for the first time, collected data in the Arctic using its indigenously moored observatory IndARC. The observatory was deployed in the Arctic sea over a year ago. The data will be crucial in understanding the influence of Arctic processes on the Indian monsoon system and climate change. The stretch of the Arctic in which the data was collected is considered a natural laboratory for studying climate variability.

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/fcvCSVCHoS1mgg2nDg6N8K/India-gets-first-data-from-its-Arctic-moored-observatory.html>

Date accessed: 05.08.15

Governance and Development

LAW AND JUSTICE

Death Row Prisoner: 'I have been told I will be executed 7 times'

(The CNN World News, August 4, 2015)

After numerous postponements, Shafqat Hussain was hanged in a Karachi prison in the early hours of Tuesday morning, according to campaign group Reprieve. Imprisoned at the age of 14, he was 24 at the time of execution. "Shafqat's execution speaks to all that is wrong with Pakistan's race to the gallows. He faced a catalogue of injustice, sentenced to death while still a child after being tortured by the police until he produced a so-called confession."

Read more: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/03/opinions/pakistan-shafqat-hussain-opinion/index.html>

Date Accessed: 4.8.2015

Adani's Australia Coal Mine hits Environmental Legal Snag; Court Revokes Approval

(PTI, Aug 5, 2015)

Indian mining giant Adani's 16.5 billion dollar project to build one of the largest coal mines in the world in Australia today suffered a setback after a court in the country revoked the government's environmental approval. Adani's environmental authority has been set aside after the court found Environment Minister Greg Hunt had not properly considered advice about two threatened species - the yakka skink and the ornamental snake in the Galilee basin, The Sydney Morning Herald reported.

Read more:

http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/48354302.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Date Accessed: 05.08.2015

Lok Sabha Passes SC/ST Atrocities Amendment Bill

(Indian Awaaz, August 4, 2015)

"The Lok Sabha today passed Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Bill. The bill was passed by a voice vote while major opposition parties were not present in the house. Earlier, replying to the debate on the bill, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thawar Chand Gehlot assured the members that the provisions of the bill will rationalize and strengthen the present law besides bringing change in the mindset of people".

Read more: <http://theindianawaaz.com/uncategorized/scst-amendment-bill-passes-in-lok-sabha/>

Date Accessed: 5.8.2015

DEFENCE

India, Pakistan and the 1971 War POWs

(Alastair Sloan, The Diplomat, August 1, 2015)

The Indian government is coming under pressure to lobby Pakistan for the release of 54 missing prisoners of war, held since the 1971 conflict. While 90,000 Pakistani troops were captured by the Indian Army at the end of the war, and then released as part of the Simla peace agreement, 54 Indian soldiers, officers and pilots continued to be held by Pakistan. Four and a half decades on, two British human rights lawyers are taking a case to the Supreme Court in Delhi on behalf of the missing men's families. Successive Indian governments have done little to recover their missing military personnel – perhaps for fear of rocking an already fragile relationship between the two countries.

Read More: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/india-pakistan-and-the-1971-war-pows/>

Date Accessed: 03.08.2015

Society

REGIONALISM

New Joint Forum of Xix Ethnic Groups

(Assam Tribune, August 09, 2015)

Six ethnic groups in Assam demanding for the status of Scheduled Tribe have constituted a 30 member joint forum in the name of 'Choi Janagoshtiyo Jatiyo Maha Sanmilan' to discuss their demand with Central government.

Read more: <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=aug1015/state059>

Date Accessed: 09.08.2015

India and World

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Russia Vetoes UN Tribunal to Investigate MH17 Crash

(The CNN World News, July 30, 2015)

Russia has blocked a U.N. Security Council resolution that would have created an international tribunal to prosecute those responsible for bringing down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine. Russia was alone in the 15-member council in voting Wednesday in New York against the establishment of the tribunal. Eleven members voted in favor. China, Venezuela and Angola abstained. MH17, which was bound from the Netherlands to Malaysia, was shot down on July 17, 2014, over Ukrainian territory controlled by pro-Russian separatists.

Read more: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/30/world/mh17-ukraine-un-tribunal/index.html>

Date Accessed: 31.7.2015

SOUTH ASIA

Nepal may Remove Secularism from New Constitution

(The Echo of India, July 28, 2015)

Eight years after turning Nepal into a secular nation, major political parties in the country are mulling to replace the key term "secularism" from the new Constitution with an appropriate word. During the public opinion collection last week, majority of the people preferred the word 'Hindu' or 'religious freedom' instead of using the term 'secularism'.

Read more: <http://echoofindia.com/kathmandu-nepal-may-remove-secularism-new-constitution-90578>

Date Accessed: 30.7.2015

EAST AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

"Sponge City" Program Soaks up Beijing's Floodwater

(New China, July 30, 2015)

Beijing is a city facing severe water scarcity. The need to confront both water shortage and urban flooding pushed the capital to find a new solution: the "Sponge City" program. The program aims to build up infrastructure to collect excessive rainfall and integrate flood control in urban planning. As a result, Beijing will not only be able to deal with excessive water, but also reuse rainwater to ease the city's thirst during a drought.

Read More: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-07/30/c_134463534.htm

Date Accessed: 30.07.2015

EUROPE

Germany Upholds Right to Use Fake Names on Facebook

(Russia Today, July 29, 2015)

German users can use fake names on Facebook, and the company is not allowed to intervene, said the latest ruling issued by a privacy watchdog. The ruling concluded that forcing people to use their real names breached the user's online privacy rights. Facebook was upset with the decision. "The use of authentic names on Facebook protects people's privacy and safety by ensuring people know who they're sharing and connecting with," Reuters quoted a spokesperson for the company.

Read more: <http://www.rt.com/news/311058-facebook-anonymity-germany-court/>

Date Accessed: 29.7.2015

OPINIONS/BOOKS

OPINIONS

Ruining Lives with Criminal ‘Justice’

(The New York Times, July 30, 2015)

The “second chances” bill is a legislation that allows some first-time criminals who commit low-level, nonviolent offenses to petition the courts for nondisclosure of their records to the general public. This offers them a legal pathway to mark “no” on job and loan applications that ask if they have ever committed a crime.

Too many Americans who make similar mistakes wind up imprisoned, impoverished and incapable of rejoining society or leading a fulfilling life. This is especially true for minorities, who so often lack the resources and the opportunities I had. For too many, the criminal justice system can lead to even greater injustice.

Read more: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/30/opinion/ruining-lives-with-criminal-justice.html?emc=edit_ty_20150730&nl=opinion&nid=71538857

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