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Counting every child: The pitiable state of birth registration across the world



WEEKLY ROUND UP OF NEWS ON POLICY

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Counting every child: The pitiable state of birth registration across the world

Nearly one in three unregistered children live in India: UNICEF

Being unregistered or lacking a birth certificate means that “the child officially does not exist”. As per the latest UNICEF report titled “Every Child’s Birth Right: Inequities and Trends in Birth Registration”, 230 million children across the world do not officially exist. One third of such unregistered children live in India. With no document to prove how old they are – or even who they are – they are likely to join the millions facing discrimination and lack of access to basic services such as health and education. We present here an overview of the global scenario on birth registration, the situation in India and the need to strengthen the system.

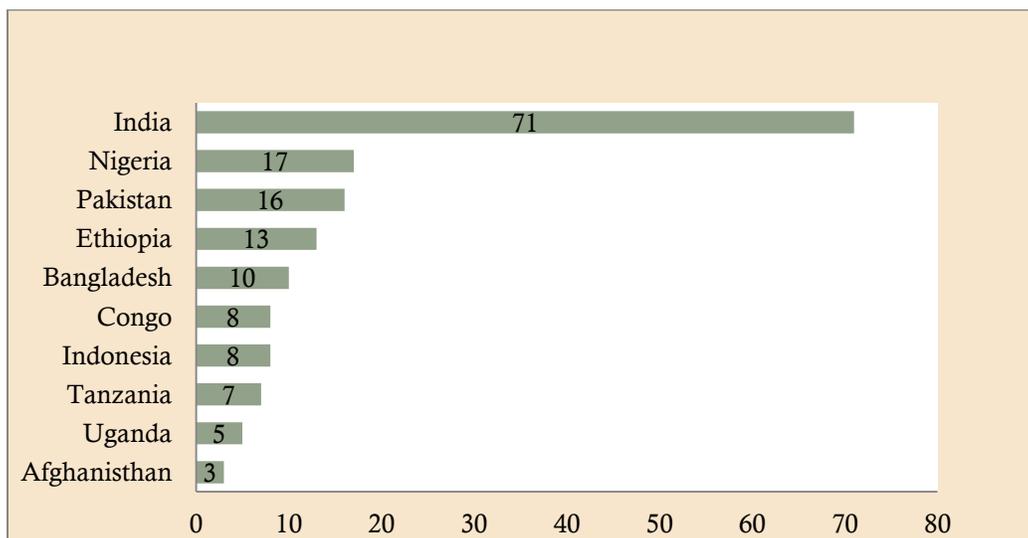
Global Scenario

The top countries with the largest numbers of unregistered children are India (71 million), followed by Nigeria (17 million), Pakistan (16 million), Ethiopia (13 million) and Bangladesh (10 million). Asia is home to more than half of these children (59 per cent); another 37 per cent live in sub-Saharan Africa; the remaining 4 per cent is from other regions. In 2012 alone, 57 million infants - four out of every ten babies delivered worldwide that year - were not registered with civil authorities.

Approximately two thirds (65 per cent) of the global population of children under five have been registered, although significant regional differences can be found. The percentage of registered children is above 90 per cent in all industrialized countries and among some countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) and Latin America and the Caribbean. In contrast, fewer than one in five children have had their births recorded in some sub-Saharan African countries.

Among the regions analysed in the UNICEF report (2013), CEE/CIS has the highest level of birth registration, with 98 per cent of children under five registered. This is followed by Latin America and the Caribbean, at 92 per cent, and the Middle East and North Africa, at 87 per cent.

The lowest levels of birth registration are found in sub-Saharan Africa (44 per cent) and South Asia (39 per cent) - the region with the largest overall number of births and children under five. In Eastern and Southern Africa, only 38 per cent of children are registered by their fifth birthday, leaving about 44 million children under five unrecorded. The rate of birth registration in West and Central Africa is slightly higher, at 47 per cent.



Birth Registration in India: History and Current Scenario

Even though India passed the Registration of Births and Deaths Act way back in 1969, the percentage of registration is still low. India does not figure in the top 10 nations with the lowest percentage of birth registration levels. However, it still has the largest number of unregistered births for children aged under five. Despite having 98% of the registration service centres in the rural areas and about 2% are in urban areas, birth of seventy-one million children have not been registered in India.

The Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969

Registration of children in India comes under the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969, which has the following provisions:

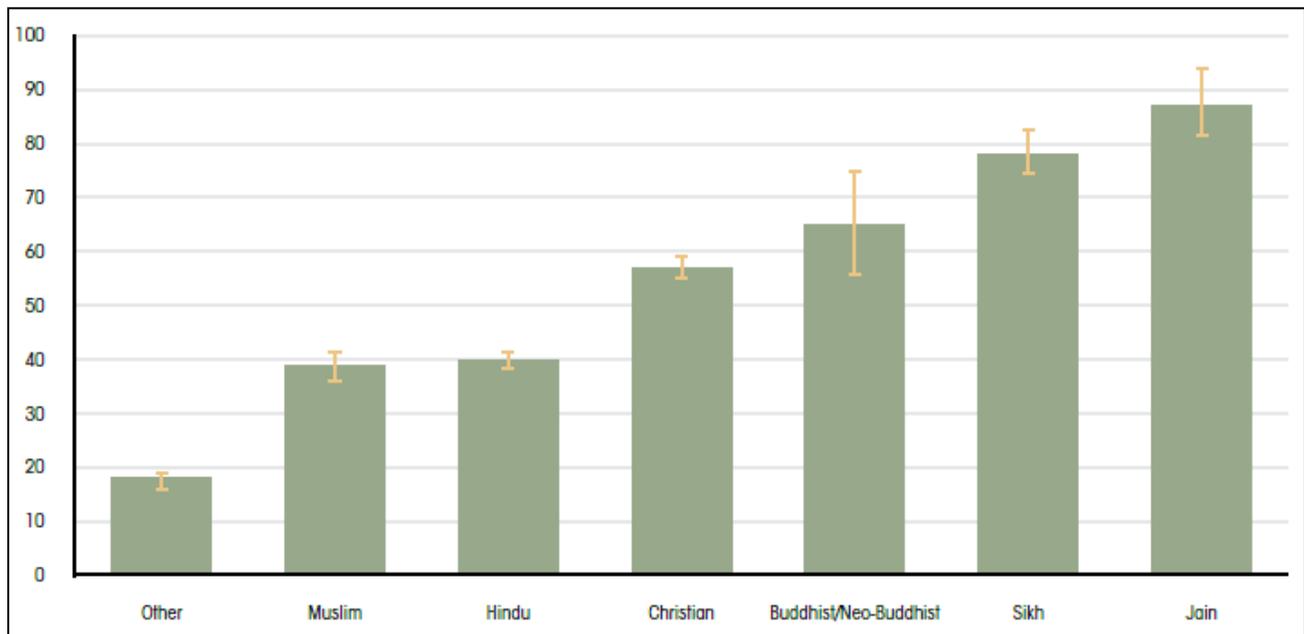
- Uniform law across the country on the registration of births and deaths
- Compulsory reporting and registration of all births and deaths
- Implementation of the Act is the responsibility of the State Governments
- Rules framed by the state governments are based on a model set of rules provided by the Central Government (Registrar General, India).

“Even these statistics do not spell a correct picture because performance of the States differs. States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu are showing a very high percentage of registration of births and deaths while most northern States are hardly recording any such events”, writes Aarti Dhar of *The Hindu*.

According to her article, the difference in the performance of states in terms of birth registration is vast. While some southern states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat have 90 percent birth registration levels others including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have reported registration rates as low as 11%. In some states the percentages were further low at 6 percent.

The article also noted that 80 to 90 per cent of differently-abled children did not have a birth certificate. Moreover, in India, girls trafficked from Bangladesh and Nepal after being rescued from brothels languish in institutions for months and years because it is difficult to prove their nationality. This is testimony for UNICEF’s view that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are unlikely to have registered births.

The 2013 UNICEF report “Every Child’s Birth Right: Inequities and Trends in Birth Registration” also provides light on birth registration in India across different religious groups. In India, the lowest levels of birth registration are found among children from the two largest population groups – Hindus and Muslims. Children from religious minorities, such as the Sikhs and Jains, are about twice as likely to be registered.



Need for better CRVS systems

UNICEF has been advocating governments across the globe to improve upon Civil Registration and generation of Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems- the benefits of which will spill over in other development schemes aimed at providing services to the vulnerable groups.

In most countries, data collection processes like population census, sample registration systems, demographic surveillance sites and household sample survey have been operating to complement incomplete CRVS systems. A majority of these processes are donor funded, project based, and only provide temporary solutions.

What is CRVS?

CRVS involves collecting information on the occurrence and characteristics of vital population events and generating vital statistics through the compilation, analysis, evaluation, presentation and dissemination of data.

Data collection not only includes information relating to birth, death, marriage and divorce, but also adoption, legitimation, recognition of parenthood, annulment of marriage, and legal separation.

In India, some states link cash incentives from certain schemes targeted towards women to timely civil registration of births at the hospital or health centre aimed at increasing the coverage of birth registration at minimal additional cost.

CRVS systems provide inputs on 42 out of 60 MDG progress indicators, mainly on maternal and child health. As the deadline for achieving MDG targets is approaching and plans for post-2015 are also being deliberated upon, the contribution of CRVS systems to make health and development intervention more effective and impactful has been on the spotlight in global discussions.

Read More at:

http://www.unicef.org/media/files/Embargoed_11_Dec_Birth_Registration_report_low_res.pdf

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/births-and-deaths-registration-still-low-in-india/article4630425.ece>

Prepared by,

Amrutha Jose Pampackal *and* Pallavi Ghosh

Rural sanitation works included under MGNREGS

(Girija Shivakumar, *The Hindu*, January 07, 2014)

It is estimated that over 620 million people practise open defecation in the India. The UPA government to, address this persisting problem, has widened the scope of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) “to include works relating to rural sanitation in collaboration with the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyaan (NBA) Scheme.”

“This interlinking is aimed at strengthening the base of rural livelihood and creates durable assets in rural areas and infrastructure at a village level. More specifically, it shall accelerate sanitation coverage in rural areas to provide privacy and dignity particularly to women.”

“As per the Para 4 (1) IV (i) of the Schedule- I of the MGNREG Act..., taking up rural sanitation related works, such as, individual household latrines, school toilets, Anganwadi toilets can be taken up either independently or in convergence with schemes of other Government Departments to achieve “open defecation free status,” stated an official Ministry of Rural Development NREGA Division circular.”

Additionally, the guidelines specifically mention where IHHLs are taken up independently under MGNREGS, “the payment shall be based on the actual value of work done, subject to the overall outflow from MGNREGS funds limited to Rs. 10,000 per IHHL including the wage rate and material cost. Any expenditure over and above this amount shall be there beneficiary contribution”.

“For all works taken up by the Gram Panchayats, including the rural sanitation works taken up based on the above guidelines, the cost of the

material component including the wages of the skilled and semi-skilled workers shall not exceed forty per cent at the Gram Panchayat level.”

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/rural-sanitation-works-included-under-mgnregs/article5549660.ece>

Date Accessed: 08.01.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

Have bank accounts for all by Jan 2016: Nachiket Mor panel

(DNA, January 07, 2014)

RBI panel report by the Committee on Comprehensive Financial Services for Small Businesses and Low-Income Households has recently suggested setting up of specialised banks to cater to low income households to ensure that all citizens above the age of 18, have bank accounts by 2016. It also suggested that facility for withdrawal, payment and deposit should be set up within a 15-minutes walking distance anywhere in the country.

The bank will be electronic in nature and would have an individual, full-service, safe, and secure electronic bank account. The panel advocated setting up of 'Payments Banks' to "provide payment services and deposit products to small businesses and low-income households" with a maximum balance of Rs 50,000 per customer. These banks can be set up with minimum capital requirement of Rs 50 crore, one-tenth of the Rs 500 crore required for full-service bank.

Some other suggestions of the committee are the following:

- Permission to banks for pricing farm loans below base rate should be withdrawn.
- Aadhaar card should be used automatically opening a bank account.
- Need for relook at the farm sector credit activities and suggested abolition of interest subventions

and loan waivers. It suggested that the government should rather distribute the benefits directly to farmers and that the banks should do away with the system of lending below their respective base rates to the farm sector.

- Gradual abolition of the statutory liquidity ratio (SLR), or the percentage of deposits invested in government bonds
- Raising the priority sector lending limit to 50 per cent, from the current 40 per cent and allowing non-deposit taking NBFCs to work as business correspondents.

The panel has set January 1, 2016 as the deadline for targets including access to formal credit as well as investment and risk management products at reasonable charges.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/money/report-have-bank-accounts-for-all-by-jan-2016-nachiket-mor-panel-1946957>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014

(Neha Singh)

Urban inequality on the rise in many states

(Somesh Jha, *Business Standard*, January 6, 2014)

Urban parts of a third of the states saw the highest inequality in 2011-12 since 1973-74, as per the data reported by the Planning Commission. Urban inequality at the all-India level with a Gini coefficient (a statistical measure, on a scale of zero to one; zero represents perfect equality and one shows perfect inequality) of 0.37 was recorded in 2011-12. The level was the highest since 1973-74, when the coefficient was 0.3.

Inequality in India is officially measured on consumption expenditure surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Office. It is not based on income distribution.

Nine states namely Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra,

Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal saw their widest rich-poor gap in their urban parts since 1973-74. Even among these, four states saw an inequality more than the national average: Karnataka (0.41), Kerala (0.39), Haryana (0.38) and West Bengal (0.38).

In Delhi, almost completely urban, the index rose from 0.32 in 2004-05 to 0.37 in 2011-12. The highest rise was experienced in Uttar Pradesh, where it rose from 0.34 in 2004-05 to 0.40 in 2011-12, whereas it lied between 0.29 and 0.33 in 1973-74 to 1999-00. In Maharashtra, urban inequality was the highest ever but rural inequality was at an all-time low of 0.25.

The reasons given for the trend followed includes:

- ‘Migration to urban parts’ as given by Dipankar Gupta, sociologist and professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University. He even said, “these states offer jobs to unskilled labour and poor people come in larger numbers to urban parts, more than the qualified ones.”
- Rapid pace of urbanisation, along with unevenness in the development pattern in these states, are also a reason for the rise in inequality, as per the experts. Three of these states (Haryana, Maharashtra and Kerala) were classified as “relatively developed” on a development index formed by the Raghuram Rajan panel.
- Tanveer Fazal, a sociologist who teaches at Jamia Milia Islamia, said “as people are moving to urban areas, the kind of development to accommodate this population is not happening, which results in inequality in such areas.” He even added that Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, for providing employment in rural areas, was a good way of providing opportunities in villages. “Studies suggest migration to cities has come down

in parts where it is implemented well,” he said.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/urban-inequality-on-the-rise-in-many-states-114010500279_1.html

Date Accessed: 6.1.2014
(Shruti Issar)

Curbing India's dependence on FII flow

(Rajrishi Singhal , *Gateway House*, 27 December, 2013)

The extent of the rupee's depreciation (25% in 9 months according to Bloomberg) in 2013, the sharpest among all emerging nations demonstrates the Indian market's dependence on and vulnerability to overseas portfolio investments.

The spectre of the Federal Reserve the U.S.'s central bank, rolling back its quantitative easing (QE) programme – also known as tapering – through which it injects cash into the dormant U.S. economy has thrust the issue of Indian pension reforms back to centre-stage.

The moment U.S. Treasuries started looking relatively attractive investors started dumping investments in bonds and equity in different emerging markets, including India. In their rush for the exit, they had to sell the emerging market currency and buy dollars. This saw the rupee depreciating.

This creates a dilemma for policy makers. The government needs foreign financial flows, especially portfolio investment, to finance the deficit. But, given the capricious nature of such funds, they are prone wreaking havoc on markets.

Indices are important because they send signals to all categories of investors about an economy's health and direction. A depreciating currency, sliding stock indices, rising bond yields – these are all indicators of an economy in turmoil.

One solution is to develop domestic institutional bulwarks. But though India has a deep pool of domestic savings, it is regulated by archaic regulations that are resulting in consistently negative real returns.

A shift from normative guidelines accompanied by a tighter regulatory and monitoring environment, as well

as improved corporate governance structures within pension fund management units is the need of the hour.

Advocacy for pension sector investment reforms also seeks to limit it to 10-15% of the total corpus which will not only provide a counter-balance to FII depredations; it will also be enough to invest in long-gestation infrastructure projects.

<http://www.gatewayhouse.in/curbing-indias-dependence-on-fii-flows/>

Date Accessed: 29.12.2013

(Gayatri Verma)

CRISIL developed a new index to measure the financial inclusion

(*Indian Express*, January 06,2013)

The rating firm Crisil recently developed a new tool called inclusix to measure the financial inclusion district of all the districts in India, the report suggested that 90 per cent of the districts have improved upon their previous year's performance.

It takes into account three parameters:

- Growth in bank branch numbers
- Deposits
- Credit provided.

While the index shows 587 of the 638 districts in the country have improved their performance in 2012 compared to 2011, the pace of progress has been uneven.

The index shows that in the state-wise sweepstakes, Gujarat ranks a lowly 15th with Kerala on top and no Gujarat district figures in the list of the top 50 districts for financial inclusion. Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan also have no district in the top-50 club. Kerala has 13 districts on the list with five of them figuring among the top 10. All four southern states are among the top 10 states. In northern India, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab are the leaders at the seventh and eighth positions.

<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/onias-rae-bareli-plummets-in-financial-inclusion-ranking-poor-show-by-gujarat-too/1213567/>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014

(Neha Singh)

'Historic' accord moves Asia-Pacific countries towards regional economic community

(*UN News Centre*, December 23, 2013)

Thirty-six Asia-Pacific nations unanimously adopted a landmark declaration at a United Nations forum of ministers, outlining the road map towards a regional economic community. The 'Bangkok Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific' was adopted at a meeting organized by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on 20 December, 2013 in Thailand.

The move brings partners closer to ensure that "this will truly be the Asia-Pacific century". "This declaration holds the promise of region-wide cooperation and policy-making in finance, connectivity, and addressing shared vulnerabilities," said Under-Secretary-General and Economic and ESCAP Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer.

"The Bangkok Declaration consists of four main action areas: bringing down trade barriers and moving towards other forms of market integration; enhancing financial cooperation including short-term liquidity support; increasing cooperation to address shared vulnerabilities and risks; connecting transport, energy and information and communications technology in the region."

http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46814&Cr=escap&Cr1=#.UsqJ3_QW22V

Date Accessed: 02.01.2014
(Amrutha Jose Pampackal)

DEVELOPMENT

Karnataka government launches Action Plan to develop villages

(*The New Indian Express*, January 05, 2014)

The Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department (RDPR) of Karnataka has decided to formulate a comprehensive action plan for the development of villages on the lines of the plan prepared for urban areas. "Preparing an action plan would help in the implementation of government-sponsored programmes and development of rural areas." The proposed action plan would assist in extending basic amenities to villages and also the formation of layouts. The Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister H K Patil claimed the 15-point programme, chalked out by the government under the employment guarantee scheme, had been successfully implemented in the State. Of the total 12,000 lakes identified for rejuvenation, 2,684 tanks had been revived.

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/Action-Plan-to-Develop-Villages-Says-Patil/2014/01/05/article1983710.ece>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Anjana John)

World Bank to fund rural water supply, sanitation project in four states

(Swati Mathur, *Times of India*, January 08, 2014)

The World Bank has approved a \$500 million credit for the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) project in four low income states -- UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam. The project,

directed towards improving piped water supply and sanitation services through decentralised delivery systems will be confined to the east UP districts, characterized, according to a World Bank report, by high water table and poor drainage. This forms one of the main reasons for the high incidence of water transmitted diseases. The funding, which relies on Census 2011 data that shows only 31% of the 167 million rural households in India have access to tap water and domestic toilets, also comes with the backing of an internal World Bank report that shows nearly 67% of rural population in India continues to defecate in the open.

The World Bank project is expected to directly benefit about 7.8 million rural people in the selected four states. With targeted interventions aimed at improving health, environmental and social standards through the supply of "safe" drinking water and sanitary conditions in villages, the project aims to emphasise on devolving power to the gram panchayats and increasing community participation.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/World-Bank-to-fund-rural-water-supply-sanitation-project-in-UP/articleshow/28530380.cms>

Date Accessed: 08.01.2014
(Anjana John)

Make CPI-linked bonds lot more customer-friendly

(C. R. L. Narasimhan, *The Hindu*, January 06, 2013)

Recently RBI has launched inflation-proof bonds called Inflation-Indexed National Savings Securities-Cumulative (or IINSS-C). The idea behind it is to have a saving instrument for a household which can hedge against inflation.

Popular savings avenues such as bank fixed deposits are not inflation-proof. Investors in these, in fact, get negative returns. For a majority of savers, for all practical purposes, bank deposits (and deposits with a few top non-

banking finance companies) have been the only option.

The consumer inflation-linked bonds have had a tepid response when they opened for subscription on December 23. Originally it was kept open for just a week but it has now been extended to end-March 2014. Lack of enthusiasm of the investors is evident from the meagre collection so far.

Features of the IINSS-C

- The instrument is designed to beat inflation will run for 10 years.
- To the reference CPI index, a minimum spread of 1.5 per cent will be added.
- Total returns will be compounded half-yearly and paid at the end of 10 years.
- Eligible investors can apply for between Rs.5,000 and Rs.5 lakh.

Complexity involved

- Returns can be had only after a period of 10 years. Pre-payment is allowed but only after three years for ordinary investors and one year for senior citizens (defined for this scheme as those above 65 years). Pre-payment charges are huge, the investor is only paid 50 per cent of the previous year's interest. A senior citizen will logically have very little use for an instrument that delivers returns after 10 years.
- There are no special tax advantages. The earnings from other savings instruments such as the PPF are not taxed at all. The recent offers of tax-free bonds by certain public sector undertakings have been a big draw even though they offer interest only once a year.
- The CPI-linked bonds need to be more customer-friendly.

<http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/make-cpilinked-bonds-lot-more-customerfriendly/article5538904.ece>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Neha Singh)

India signs labour pact with Saudi Arabia

(*The Siasat Daily*, January 003, 2014)

India and Saudi Arabia have signed an agreement on labour cooperation for domestic service workers recruitment that will cover about a quarter of the 28 lakh Indian expatriates working there and could be the stepping stone for a more comprehensive pact covering all Indian workers in the Gulf Kingdom.

The agreement regulates contractual relations between employers and domestic workers, ensures authenticity and implementation of the employment contract, promises action against recruitment agencies violating laws and seeks to establish a mechanism to provide 24 hours assistance to domestic workers. A standard employment contract would set out minimum wages, working hours, paid holidays and a dispute settlement mechanism.

<http://www.siasat.com/english/news/india-saudi-arabia-ink-labour-cooperation-pact>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Deepti Somani)

Community radio: a new model for tackling bonded labour in India

(Aashish Yadav, *BBC*, December 30, 2013)

This article highlights the positive impact of community radio, a tool used to tackle bonded labour in India under a project undertaken by BBC Media Action. Despite being abolished in 1976, bonded labour is still prevalent. It is a practice in which employers give high-interest loans to workers, who then work at low wages to pay off the debt.

The Project aims to develop 'listeners' villages', a new way of sharing essential through popular radio programming and community outreach. The listeners' village model is run on people power: people at the grassroots level gather content, share it and make sure that it has maximum reach and impact. The listener village helps community members to identify them, complementing local initiatives focused on rescue and rehabilitation.

Stories of struggle and success are gathered by reporters from the local community trained in bonded labour awareness, community engagement and using recording equipment. A 30-minute radio programme is then produced containing drama based on the stories gathered, along with expert interviews and folk music. Each episode also contains crucial information on government schemes and agencies that target bonded labour, schemes, safe migration, trafficking, methods of rescue, minimum wages, and how NGOs and the media can help.

Dissemination is undertaken by community facilitators, who are identified as agents of change within their village by partner NGOs and are trained on group cohesion and conflict resolution, along with how to capture results coming from the activities. The key to making this model work is the authenticity of the information and the trust placed in the messenger. The model takes information to all households, rather than the most influential members of a community and the facilitated discussions help whole communities to work together, irrespective of differences in caste and religion.

The project has had a positive impact with villagers now discussing the issues. The project creates a supportive community made up of neighbours, relatives, even officials, who are connected and understand the issues that the programmes raise. Given the scale of bonded labour in India, these changes are significant in communities that until now have had scant, if any, information about rights,

no exposure to media, and a history of exploitation.

Given how the tool of community radio has helped disseminate information and raise awareness, the political representatives must use this to tackle and address other social issues.

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/dec/30/bbc-drama-india-bonded-labour>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Deepti Somani)

GOVERNMENT Government to launch internet spy system 'Netra' soon

(*The Echo of India*, January 05, 2013)

The Home Ministry is giving finishing touches to 'Netra', an internet spy system capable of detecting malafide messages which will be deployed by all security agencies to capture any dubious voice traffic passing through software like Skype or Google Talk, besides write-ups in tweets, status updates, emails, instant messaging transcripts, internet calls, blogs and forums. The 'Netra' internet spy system has been developed by Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (CAIR), a lab under Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). "When Netra is operationalised, security agencies will get a big handle on monitoring activities of dubious people and organisations which use internet to carry out their nefarious designs."

<http://www.echoofindia.com/new-delhi-govt-launch-internet-spy-system-netra-soon-45587>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Anjana John)

EDUCATION

Schools witness an improvement in attendance status

(Akshaya Mukul, *The Times Of India*, January 7, 2014)

According to latest figures from the Human Resource and Development ministry, there has been improvement in the attendance status of students and teachers in the six years between 2006-07 to 2012-13.

Bihar stands out in terms of performance with the average attendance at primary level increasing from 42.2% in 2006-07 to 63.6% in 2012-13. Similarly, the attendance at the upper primary level witnessed a jump from 36.8% in 2006-07 to 59.7% in 2012-13. Uttarakhand emerged as the only state where attendance had declined from 80% in 2006-07 to 76.5% in 2012-13 at primary level and from 83.2% to 81.3% at the upper primary level.

However, the nation, overall witnessed an increase of 7.7% at the primary level and a 2.1% boost at the upper primary level between 2006-07 to 2012-13. The teacher attendance improved to 84.3% from 81.7% at the primary level and 81.3% from 80.5% at the upper primary level.

However, in many states including Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh the attendance of teachers declined at both levels. In some cases like Assam and Haryana, the decline was sharp at the upper primary level.

According to HRD sources, the decline in teacher attendance could be because the state governments deploy teachers for non-teaching jobs like election duty or census work.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/RTE-states-efforts-push-up-school-attendance/articleshow/28493326.cms>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Pallavi Ghosh)

SC declines to interfere with Right to Education law

(DNA, January 06, 2014)

The Supreme Court has declined to interfere with the Right to Education Act, "which provides for free and compulsory elementary education without holding back the promotion of a child to next class till class 8."

A bench of Justice H.L.Dattu and Justice S.A.Bobde, rejected a plea by petitioner Abhishek Gupta seeking the stay of section 16 of the act, which says: "No child admitted in a school shall be held back or expelled from the school until completion of elementary education."

"Contending there were several scenarios where students were getting promoted even without learning, Gupta told the court that under the right to education scheme, 'passing is compulsory and education is optional'. He argued that RTE makes the learning and teaching process doubtful." Gupta added that the government through RTE was promoting the students without education.

"Mocking the provision, Gupta said, "If a teacher does not teach, the child is passed. (It relieves teacher from the duty of teaching). If a child does not learn, child is passed. (It relieves child from the duty of learning). If a child does not attend school, child is still passed. (It relieves child from the duty of attending the school) and this together, relieves the government from the duty of educating the children of our country."

Disagreeing with the petitioner, the court noted that, "It is not that without studying they will pass."

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-sc-declines-to-interfere-with-right-to-education-law-1946478>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Ashwin Varghese)

Centre to launch adult education scheme for Muslims

(Indianawaz, January 07, 2014)

In a meeting of the National Monitoring committee for Minorities education Union HRD Minister M M Pallam Raju, addressing the issue of muslim education, assured that the government will soon launch an adult education scheme for Muslims above the age of 15 years.

"The scheme with a corpus of 600 crore rupees will ensure attainment of functional literacy to one crore muslim adults. "Under Adult Education, a new scheme called Maulana Azad Taleem-e-Baligan is also being formulated to impart functional literacy to one crore muslim adults in the age group of 15 years and above at the proposed outlay of Rs.600 crores over the 12th Plan Period. The scheme initially will be launched in 16 to 17 muslim concentrated districts across the country."

Another new scheme for establishing educational hubs by co-locating KGBV, Girls Hostels, Degree colleges, Polytechnics in few selected towns, Districts which are educationally backward and have substantial Muslim concentration, is also being worked out. Apart from this a new scheme for skill development among minorities girls is proposed on the lines of HUNAR at the outlay of Rs 978 crores. It will benefit 9.2 lakh minorities girls.

Madrasas have been provided funds under the special training component of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in the current year to cover children who are out of school. Free text books have been provided to 17.3 lakh students in Madarasas under SSA.

http://theindianawaaz.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16189&catid=12

Date Accessed: 07.01.2013
(Neha Singh)

HEALTH

India launches first adolescent health programme

(Daily News Analysis, January 07, 2014)

The government has launched the nation's first comprehensive adolescent health programme, which will include a sharp focus on adolescents' sexual health.

Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, while launching the programme, reiterated how the government stands committed to addressing the health needs of 243 million adolescents, who constitute 21% of the total population in India.

The programme envisions that all adolescents in India are able to realize their full potential by making informed and responsible decisions related to their health and well-being.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-govt-launches-india-s-first-adolescent-health-programme-1946711>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Haryana implements nutrition policy for women, children

(The Echo of India, January 04, 2013)

The Haryana government has implemented the State Nutrition Policy for Women and Children to improve the nutritional status of adolescent girls and women in the state. The policy aims to develop an integrated and multi-sectoral strategy to reduce the number of moderately underweight children in 0-5 years of age by 10 per cent over a period of 5 years, and the number of severely underweight children in the same age group by 50 per cent. "The goal is also

to achieve reduction in incidence of low birth weight by 10 per cent by the end of the 12th Five Year Plan. It also aims to eliminate blindness due to deficiency of vitamin A and reduction in Bitot's Spot in children and reduction in iron deficiency anaemia among women, pregnant women and children by 20 per cent." A State Nutrition Council would be constituted under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister and ministers and experts as member to coordinate, guide and review the implementation of the policy.

<http://www.echoofindia.com/chandigarh-haryana-implements-nutrition-policy-women-children-45511>

Date Accessed: 06.01.2014

(Anjana John)

Oral contraceptive pills raise risk of breast cancer 9.5 times: AIIMS study

(Kundan Pandey, Down To Earth, January 3, 2014)

According to a research published in the Indian Journal of Cancer, a long term use of oral contraceptive pills can cause breast cancer. Other factors include early menarche and late menopause.

According to the report, the risk of breast cancer was 9.5 times higher in women having a history of consumption of oral contraceptive pills.

In the study, spread over 2005-06, the researchers included total of 320 breast cancer patients and an equal number of matched control group. Majority of the patients belonged to urban areas.

According to the study, the mean age of menarche in breast cancer patients was 13.20, while the average age of the control group was 14.58 years. The patients were of higher age at the time of marriage and had undergone higher number of abortions as

compared to the control group. It was also found that patients attained menopause at a later age as compared to members of the control group.

Previous clinical, animal and epidemiological studies have already identified breast cancer as a hormonally mediated disease. Several factors that influence hormonal status are associated with the risk of breast cancer including a sustained use of oral contraceptive pills.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/oral-contraceptive-pills-raise-risk-breast-cancer-95-times-aiims-study>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad launches the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK)

(Press Information Bureau, January 07, 2013)

Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, has launched the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK).

He stated that the programme will address the health needs of 243 million adolescents, who account for over 21% of the country's population. The programme will bring under its ambit mental health, nutrition, substance misuse, gender based violence and non-communicable diseases, apart from its original mandate of sexual and reproductive health. "The programme introduces community based interventions through peer educators, and is underpinned by collaborations with other Ministries and State governments, knowledge partners and more research. Referring to the strategic approach to RMNCH+A (Reproductive, Maternal, New born, Child Health + Adolescent) ...the Health Minister said that new focus on

adolescents is in recognition of the fact that without adolescent health, maternal and child health outcomes may continue to elude us.”

“The RSKS programme defines an adolescent as a person within 10-19 years of age, in urban and rural areas, includes both girls and boys, married and unmarried, poor and affluent, whether they are in school or out of school. This broad definition helps to address the myriad problems of adolescents across various groups and categories, she stated. The programme emphasises seven ‘Cs’- coverage, content, communication, counselling, clinics and convergence.”

“The Health Minister also launched the handbooks on strategy frameworks which includes the framework for monitoring, supervision and evaluation of the programme once it is rolled out; the handbook on operational framework which will help to translate the programme into action; and the resource pack for the ANMs(Auxiliary Nurse Midwives), ASHAs(Accredited Social Health Activists), medical officers, LHV and peer educators.”

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=102328>

Date Accessed: 08.12.2013
(Ashwin Varghese)

Forum urges for Treatment Policy

(*The Sangai Express*, December 09, 2013)

The Hepatitis Forum Manipur has urged the Government to find out the number of people infected by hepatitis C virus (HCV) and formulate a treatment policy.

Hepatitis Forum Manipur President RK Tiken informed that “mortality rate of people infected with HCV and co-infected by HCV and HIV has been rising rapidly in the State. Out of 100 injecting drug users tested for HCV, 80 were found positive. But the total number of HCV positive people has not been estimated and the State

Government has no policy for their treatment.” He further stated that “there are many complications in the treatment of people co-infected by HCV and HIV and it is very costly.” Therefore, majority of the patients in the state have cannot afford proper treatment.

The forum also pointed out that “the Government of India has various public health policies including TB policy, bird flu programme etc but there is no policy for hepatitis C virus and it only reflects Government’s apathy.” Some of the recommendations forwarded by the forum are “review of the existing State HIV policy and incorporation of HCV in the revised policy, inclusion of hepatitis C virus medicines in the National Essential Medicines List of India 2011, extension of RSBY benefits to HCV positive people belonging to BPL category, extension of monetary assistance to HCV positive people under the Manipur State Illness Assistance Fund and organisation of extensive awareness programmes on HCV.

<http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/tseitm-34406-forum-urges-for-treatment-policy/>

Date Accessed: 09.01.2014
(Juntay Sharma Pathak)

TECHNOLOGY How technology is used in Bihar to prevent Child Marriage?

(*Firstpost*, January 09, 2014)

A radio-over-phone platform in the rural Bihar and Jharkhand is aiming to use technology for social change, by using it to eliminate child marriage. Built on an interactive voice response system, ‘Gramvani’ allows people to call a number and leave a message about their community or listen to messages left by others. Shobha SV, the project’s multimedia

manager says the project is aimed at involving the people in a dialogue that is crucial for bringing in any social change. It can also record their suggestions and queries and get back to the people, thus making the conversation two-way and more effective

Breakthrough: a global human rights organisation came up with the project as part of its ‘Nation Against Child Marriage’ campaign in August 2013. Encouraged by the response during its pilot stage, the organisation has reintroduced the popular radio-tie up in Jharkhand and Bihar from January to March this year.

The reintroduction of the program comes in the wake of a recent report by Unicef stating that in South Asia, nearly half the number of girls who married early belonged to India. The figures claim that 23 million girls in India face the imminent threat of child marriage. Child marriage in the country has been estimated to be decreasing at a rate of less than one percent a year.

Working on a range of issues like health, infant mortality agriculture, domestic violence and gender issues, ‘Jharkhand Mobile Vani’ or ‘Gramvani’ aims to expand its ambit of broadcast and is currently working on a mechanism that allows the system to report cases of child marriage to the authority

<http://tech.firstpost.com/news-analysis/tech-used-prevent-child-marriage-bihar-208152.html>

Date Accessed: 09.01.2014
(Neha Singh)

ENVIRONMENT

SC directs Centre to set up National Environment Regulator

(Dhananjay Mahapatra, *The Times Of India*, January 6, 2014)

The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to set up the national environment regulator that will examine environmental impact assessment of every project. The deadline that the apex court has given for setting up the regulatory body is March 31.

While the ministry of environment and forests will continue to act as the authority to give permission under the Forest Act, the regulator will oversee the implementation of the Forest Policy of 1988.

The order is likely impact the Centre's decision to ease the stringent Environmental Impact Assessment scrutiny of projects and enable their early clearance.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Set-up-national-environment-regulator-SC-to-Centre/articleshow/28472636.cms>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Pallavi Ghosh)

AGRICULTURE

Drip-Irrigation Project promoting farming in Ranchi

(Santosh K. Kiro, *The Telegraph*, January 09, 2014)

Under National Mission for Micro Irrigation, funded by central and state governments, a drip-irrigation project for vegetable growing has been set up on 15 acres in Ranchi.

“Drip irrigation technology will enable over 30 villagers to raise vegetables — as well as other crops —

all through the year...Under the national mission, Rs 35,000 were allotted to a farmer per 25 decimal — or one unit — of land. For this, the Centre gave 50 per cent subsidy, while the state pitched in with 40 per cent. The farmer bore only 10 per cent of the total project cost.”

Water, for this project, “is sourced from Getalsud dam, channelled through pipes and directed via a network of ducts with holes to reach the roots of the saplings without wastage anywhere. Optimum utilisation of water under this system makes irrigation feasible round the year.”

This intervention is fostering agriculture in the area and more people are taking up farming.

JSLPS (Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society) official K. Hussain noted that “Migration to cities in search of jobs from Angara villages virtually stopped. Each farmer is now earning between Rs 50,000 to Rs 1.50 lakh per year from vegetable cultivation.”

“The farmers under the national mission can hope to earn more as they are getting more subsidy than those under the JSLPS, where financial assistance amounts to 50 per cent and Rs 29,600 per 25 decimal land.”

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140109/jsp/jharkhand/story_17765276.jsp#.Us7XMNIQCSp

Date Accessed: 09.01.2014
(Ashwin Varghese)

DEFENCE

Exchange of list of nuclear installations between India and Pakistan

(*Ministry of External Affairs*, January 01, 2014)

India and Pakistan exchanged lists of their nuclear facilities as part of a

1988 pact that bars them from attacking each other's nuclear installations. The exchange, occurring in New Delhi and Islamabad, has been held each New Year's Days since 1992.

India and Pakistan exchanged, through diplomatic channels simultaneously at New Delhi and Islamabad, the list of nuclear installations and facilities covered under the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations between India and Pakistan.

The agreement, which was signed on December 31, 1988 and entered into force on January 27, 1991, provides, inter alia, that the two countries inform each other of nuclear installations and facilities to be covered under the Agreement on the first of January of every calendar year. This is the twenty third consecutive exchange of such lists between the two countries, the first one having taken place on January 1, 1992.

<http://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/22702/Exchange+of+list+of+nuclear+installations+between+India+and+Pakistan>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Jeet Singh)

India gets near bottom rank in Nuclear Material Safety Index

(Anupam Chakravarty, *Down To Earth*, January 09, 2014)

According to the Nuclear Materials Security Index (NMSI), India has been placed just ahead of Iran and North Korea among the nuclear-armed countries in terms of securing safety of nuclear materials. The set of data was published by US-based non-profit, Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI).

Although India's position has improved since 2012 (41 out of 100) in terms of keeping its nuclear materials safe, it continues to hold

23rd position among 25 countries with weapons-usable nuclear materials. India lags behind its nuclear-armed neighbours, China and Pakistan. India scored additional points for contributing to IAEA Nuclear Security fund and adopting United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 which regulates nuclear proliferation.

The report states that, “India’s regulatory structure is missing key provisions on security; in some cases, security measures are recommended but not required. Weaknesses are particularly apparent in the areas of transport security, material control and accounting, and measures to protect against the insider threat, such as personnel vetting and mandatory reporting of suspicious behavior.”

India has failed to pass a legislation to establish an independent regulatory agency for nuclear security. Also, the report indicates that as opposed to the global trend of reducing weapons-grade nuclear material in the last four years, India is among the four countries which have increased nuclear materials. The other three are the United Kingdom, Japan and Pakistan. While the UK and Japan increased nuclear materials for civilian purpose, Pakistan and India have increased it in both civilian and military use.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/india-gets-near-bottom-rank-nuclear-materials-safety-index>

Date Accessed: 10.01.2014

(Simi Sunny)

GENDER

Increasing number of women reporting Rape

(Hakeem Irfan, *DNA*, January 4, 2014)

This article how there has been an increase in registration of crimes against women in Delhi, which can perhaps be attributed to the measures taken by the Delhi police.

Statistics reveal that four women are raped and nine molested in Delhi every day. Delhi police has registered 1,559 cases of rape and 3,347 cases of molestation in 2013, as against 680 rapes and 653 molestation cases in 2012, showing a more than 100% increase in the number of cases registered.

However, Delhi Police claims to have solved around 90% of the crimes against women and attributed the increase in crime statistics to its policy of giving primary importance to registration of crime.

As the number of rapes has increased, Delhi Police would be filing chargesheet in every case within 20 days and if there is some delay it would be immediately brought into notice of the special commissioner and then to the police chief.

In 2014, 306 women sub inspectors, 1,300 women constables would be recruited to ensure that complaints of women are handled and investigated properly. Also, women police personnel have been deployed in 100 PCR vans to ensure swift action, if any women is in distress.

While such steps will ensure sensitive support to women victims of crime, the increasing crime rate also points out how despite the various measures taken by the police, Delhi continues to be unsafe for women.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/delhi/report-four-rapes-and-nine-molestations->

[reported-in-delhi-everyday-last-year-1944984](http://www.dnaindia.com/delhi/report-four-rapes-and-nine-molestations-1944984)

Date Accessed: 6.1.2014
(Divashri Mathur)

New guidelines for psychological support to molestation victims

(Aarti Dhar, *The Hindu*, January 09, 2014)

“The Department of Health Research (DHR) has drawn up guidelines on addressing psychological aspects of sexual violence. The new rules focus on bracing a victim of sexual assault for ‘secondary victimisation’ resulting from inadequate support from family, friends, service providers, and the criminal justice system. According to the guidelines, a counsellor must tell a victim what might happen in court and discuss methods by which they can handle the situation. Visualisation techniques can be employed to help the victim recover from the trauma soon after being questioned; conversations with friends and family can be used to prevent the victim from thinking about the ordeal.”

“The guidelines suggest the survivor may feel a sense of injustice resulting from lack of information; perceived lack of interest by the police or courts, delay in the legal process; or loss of income or job resulting from the impact of the assault.”

The author notes that ‘secondary victimization’ by family and society is not uncommon and that such treatment may have a great negative impact on the victim’s mental health and increase feelings of vulnerability.

“According to the guidelines, the counsellor/nurse/doctor should provide the victim with clear, accurate, unbiased information regarding her medical options and then, regardless of her choices, be supportive and non-judgmental of the decisions she makes. It will also be important to explain clearly to the woman as to why the examination is required.”

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/new-guidelines-for-psychological-support-to-molestation-victims/article5554590.ece>

Date Accessed: 09.01.2014
(Ashwin Varghese)

CHILDREN

Railway stations to get Child Protection Committees

(Devesh Pandey, *The Hindu*, January 07, 2014)

As per the standard operating procedure developed by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, railway stations, which are a major transit points for human trafficking, will soon get Child Protection Committees.

The CPCs at every major railway station will be responsible and authorised to set and ensure the mechanism for care and protection of children at and around railway stations. It will function as a nodal and apex body for provision of all child protection issues at the railway station-level. Instructions have also been issued to establish children assistance centres at railway stations, with a pre-defined provision for food, temporary shelter, clothing, toilet facilities, first-aid and medicines for the children in need.

A woman Railway employee will manage the centre to ensure that girls get proper attention till they are produced before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC). Further, Railway officials, as part of the unit, will also go undergo training on issues of child rights and protection.

Several non-government organisations working with victims of child abuse and trafficking have welcomed the initiative, stating that it would help check crimes against minors.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/railway-stations-to-get-child-protection-panels/article5548426.ece>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Deepti Somani)

SOCIAL JUSTICE **Jain community to get minority status**

(Sandeep Sonwalker, *India TV*, January 07, 2014)

The govt. is seriously considering over a proposal to give minority status to the Jain community in India, who constitute 2% of the population.

Jain community in Punjab had appealed to the Central govt. to give them minority status, so that members of the community can avail of scholarships and funds under the Prime Minister's 15-point programme for minorities.

The Law Ministry has given its green signal to this proposal. A review petition is pending before the Supreme Court challenging a three-judge verdict on the issue. However, Law Minister Kapil Sibal says, this does not bar the Centre from notifying Jains as a minority community under the National Commission for Minorities Act.

Jains have been notified as a minority in 13 states including Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.

The Jains are now demanding a national minority status since they say their religion from Hinduism as they have separate ceremonies for births, deaths and marriages.

Once notified, Jains will become the sixth religious minority in India after Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Parsis.

<http://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/latest-news-jain-community-to-get-minority-status--32193.html>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Deepti Somani)

REGIONAL **Need of an efficient emergency response mechanism in Angamaly district**

(M. P. Praveen, *The Hindu*, January 7, 2014)

The article points out the need of an efficient emergency response mechanism to potential chemical hazards in Angamaly district in Kerala. The Chemical Emergency Response Centre (CHEMREC) at Kakkannad, is the only such facility in the State. The article also states that CHEMREC, which lacks both manpower and equipment, needs to be strengthened.

Recently, LPG leak from a tanker exposed the void of emergency response in Angamaly district, which has the most number of industrial units dealing with hazardous chemicals in the State. The institutional support to respond to an emergency situation is weak and inadequate. The CHEMREC is manned by an overburdened staff of the Factories and Boilers Department. Additionally, "the equipment bought by the centre with an initial funding of Rs.30 lakh by the Union government became useless as they were bought with insufficient understanding of their use." In order to improve the efficiency of CHEMREC, measures like chemical emergency management kits, relief and response materials like ambulances, evacuation vans, fire-fighting equipment and other safety gadgets ought to be employed.

In order to address the void of a response mechanism, the article suggests the use of HAZMAT (Hazardous Materials) rescue vehicle. It is a critical component of chemical emergency response centres in developed countries and a vehicle for shifting manpower during emergencies continue to remain pipedreams.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Kochi/a-response-centre-only-to-be-remembered-in-an-emergency/article5548489.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 06.01.2014
(Mahima Malik)

Seng Khasi urges government to act upon National Minorities Commission's recommendations

(*The Telegraph*, January 6, 2014)

Seng Khasi- an indigenous cultural and socio-religious organisation- has been pursuing the Meghalaya government to constitute the minorities department, minorities commission and a finance corporation acting upon the March 1999 recommendations of Tahir Mahmood- the then chairman of the National Minorities Commission.

The organisation had moved the Centre, state government and National Minorities Commission to recognise those Seng Khasi and Niam Tre communities as minorities in 2008-09.

Meghalaya, a predominantly Christian state, is also home to those who belong to Seng Khasi and Niam Tre. Out of the nearly 30 lakh population in the entire state, Seng Khasi and Niam Tre constitute about 10-11 per cent of it. While in the Khasi-Jaintia hills around 25 per cent of the population belongs to both these communities.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140106/jsp/northeast/story_17755596.jsp#.UsumovQW2aJ

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Pallavi Ghosh)

Japan's infrastructure boost for Gujarat

(The Times of India, October 18, 2013)

Japan has assured Gujarat that it would pump in resources in many infrastructure projects in the state. The rising population of Gujarat demands concrete infrastructure for planned urbanisation. The projects already in the pipeline include intelligence traffic system in Ahmedabad, a railway project for the state and an industrial park for Japanese companies that will give a major infrastructure boost to the state.

There are various projects stated in the article that will be operational with the help of expertise from Japan. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) had recently signed a "MoU with Indian Railways for commissioning a study for high-speed rail between Mumbai and Ahmedabad." Toyota has been commissioned to conduct a survey for the new proposed Ahmedabad international airport on Public Private Partnership (PPP). Intelligent traffic system, with an envisaged investment of Rs 11-crore, for Ahmedabad will also be put on the fast track. An industrial park, developed by JETRO, is also expected to house more than 50 Japanese companies.

Highlighting the need for efficient delivery of civic amenities, Former Union urban secretary M Ramchandran said, "Today India is the world's second largest urbanized country with 13% population without toilets, 5,860 towns without drainage services and 26% of our urban population earning less than Rs 5,000 a month."

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-10-18/ahmedabad/43177170_1_indian-railways-narendra-modi-ahmedabad-municipal-corporation

Date Accessed: 05.01.2014

(Mahima Malik)

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

2014 Geopolitical Star-gazing

(Ambassador Neelam Deo, Gateway House, 27 December, 2013)

Gateway House's geopolitical forecast for 2014:

India: Whichever party leads the next government, its first task will be to straighten out the many **distortions and dysfunctions** in the economy.

India is not among the countries negotiating the **Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement**, which will create broad preferential trade areas across Asia and globally. Unless the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, an Asian trade agreement, takes off, we could find ourselves isolated and irrelevant in the **new trading era**.

Security: India must go beyond the economic aid and institutional support it currently provides to **Afghanistan**, and coordinate with other stakeholders to **step up military assistance** to ensure our own security, as well as the survival of Afghanistan.

The **increasing assertiveness of China** is a growing concern in Asia. But, oversensitive as we are to Chinese and Pakistani concerns, we are losing the increased strategic space that became available through the outreach from the U.S. and its allies – Japan, Australia, and to a lesser extent South Korea.

The biggest immediate geostrategic threat to India in 2014 could, however, emerge out of the attacks on secular forces, collapsing democratic governance, and rising **extremist violence in Bangladesh**. We must promote the prospects of the friendly, secular Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government, which has acted firmly against anti-India terrorist groups.

Africa: The economies of South and West Africa will continue to **perform reasonably well**. Central

African countries, however, such as **South Sudan** and the Central African Republic, are descending into renewed ethnic strife and chaos. Although just entering the **oil market**, their troubles will affect India, which has invested big in oil in South Sudan.

Latin America: **Chile** will see renewed education and tax reforms under President Michelle Bachelet; **Mexico** will implement major reforms, including the opening of the **energy sector**. The experiment of **Uruguay**, to legalise and regulate the consumption and production of marihuana, may hold **lessons for the global war on drugs**, including for a shaky Afghanistan.

BRICS: Their mandate is likely to be **enlarged and firmed up** next year. The grouping is already in the process of creating institutions that will determine how to invest and manage the \$100 billion Currency Reserve Fund and the South-South Development Bank. The currency swap agreements, however, are unlikely to have any major impact, as China, the world's biggest trader, works to internationalise its own currency.

Hopefully, 2014 will see a greater focus on **environmental sustainability** – a discourse so far relegated to the margins of economic growth concerns.

<http://www.gatewayhouse.in/2014-geopolitical-star-gazing/>

Date Accessed: 29.12.2013
(Gayatri Verma)

SOUTH ASIA Maldives to get credit facility from India

(*Exim News Service, January 5, 2014*)

India will soon support Maldives with a standby credit facility of \$25 million for imports from India as mentioned by Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, after the delegation-level meeting. He even said that the two leaders "discussed ways and means of expanding"

economic relations. A joint statement was even issued after the talks reporting that India had agreed to consider favourably the Maldivian request for import of diesel, petrol and aviation fuel from India.

Dr Singh also mentioned that the current bilateral trade of about Rs 700 crore was balanced "overwhelmingly" in India's favour, and it is necessary to have "more balanced trade between the two countries."

"We will certainly do all we can to encourage the flow of Indian tourists to Maldives. Increase in Indian investment in Maldives would also contribute to expansion of our economic relations," he said.

<http://www.eximin.net/NewsDetails.aspx?name=74453>

Date Accessed : 6.1.2014
(Shruti Issar)

India, China among nations with worst religious freedom: Report

(*Brian Pellet, Charisma News, January 02, 2014*)

According to a new report released by Human Rights without Frontiers International, eight of the 47 countries that hold seats on the United Nations Human Rights Council imprisoned people in 2013 under laws that restrict religious freedom.

The eight UNHRC members are Morocco, China, Saudi Arabia, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Libya and South Korea.

As per the report, hundreds of believers and atheists were imprisoned in these and 16 other countries for exercising **religious freedom** or freedom of expression rights related to religious issues. These rights include the freedom to change religions, share beliefs, object to military service on conscientious grounds, worship,

assemble and associate freely. Violations related to religious defamation and blasphemy are also included in the report.

<http://www.charismanews.com/world/42265-report-china-india-among-nations-with-worst-religious-freedom>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Deepti Somani)

India wishes to work with Maldives and other like-minded Nations to ensure peace in the Indian Ocean Region, says President

(Press Information Bureau, January 03, 2014)

President Pranab Mukherjee in a meeting with Mr. Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, the President of Maldives India expressed wishes to work with Maldives and other like-minded Nations to ensure peace in the Indian Ocean Region.

“The President said among the areas of close cooperation between India and Maldives is our excellent defence and security relationship. India, like Maldives, would like to see uninterrupted peace and security prevail in the Indian Ocean region. Both countries have had to address the challenges of piracy, smuggling, extremism and religious fundamentalism. India remains fully cognizant of the needs of Maldives in dealing with these issues and is committed to assist in achieving the defence and security objectives of the Government of Maldives.”

The resident also noted that at “a regional level, the two countries can do much more to enhance cooperation among the States to achieve better maritime domain awareness and increase coordination and surveillance by them. India has always been happy to extend support and assistance, as and when required, to Maldives.”

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=102294>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Ashwin Varghese)

EAST AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

As population ages, Hong Kong proposes incentives to increase births and immigration

(Vanessa Ko, *Smart Planet*, November 18, 2013)

In the context of a rapidly aging population, Hong Kong government has proposed a population policy to that would attempt to increase the birth rate and promote immigration using financial and other incentives. But the idea of having more people come here, while perhaps rationally sound, is not always greeted with enthusiasm.

While some locals are just not friendly to the idea of having outsiders, the squeeze on resources in the recent years and a crowded living environment are the main reasons for people’s anxiety about the new policy. Critics of the Hong Kong government say that “the seemingly paramount focus on sustaining the economy is -- and traditionally has been -- taking priority over any improvements to the way pepoliople live”.

According to Alice Poon, an expert on the city’s land policies, Hong Kong society’s call for population control and its scepticism about the government proposal seem justified because of the prevalent social problems ranging from (lack of) housing to (poor) quality of education, inadequate medical care, and fast-declining quality of life.

However the government said a population cap would be “undesirable” since the city’s high life expectancy - currently third highest in the world, behind Japan

and Switzerland - combined with a low birth rate will mean that by 2041, of every 1,000 people living here, 712 will be elderly.

“One aspect of this push for a population increase, as detailed in the committee’s statement, is to embrace mainland immigrants who are settling here based on laws regarding family ties and birthright residency.” But for residents, this attitude may be hard to digest.

<http://www.smartplanet.com/blog/global-observer/where-some-see-overpopulation-a-plan-to-attract-more-people/>

Date Accessed: 3.12.2013
(Amrutha Jose Pampackal)

China adopts policy to reduce oversupply of solar cell makers

(Toru Sugawara, *Asian Review*, December 24, 2013)

The Chinese government is pushing for a drastic shake-out of the country’s overcrowded solar cell industry, supporting only a quarter of players and practically pushing “excess capacity” out of the market. The photovoltaic industry, which was under immense pressure, has of late shown signs of revival. The policy of eliminating “excess capacity” will further help the sector’s revival.

China offers a number of strong incentives to encourage the entry of players in various sectors. But the government has been reaping bad results in the form of excess capacity in several other industries, including steel, cement and shipbuilding, and is calling for consolidation. The photovoltaic industry presently has more than 500 companies. The ministry has shortlisted companies that will “not be able to get credit lines from financial institutions and thus will have a tough time borrowing.” This is expected to reduce the “excess capacity” that has lately been bringing inefficiency and loss to the sector.

China's photovoltaic industry has been facing stiff problems, given slowing demand in Europe, and competition with the U.S. The average solar module price has been declining, owing to the oversupply in the industry. However, the sector has shown signs of revival. A Solarbuzz analyst expected the demand jumping 30% from this year's projected level to reach 45 million kilowatts in 2014.

The companies will no longer be eligible for refunds of export tariffs which is a huge blow to companies that depend on overseas business. It will also be difficult for them to participate in state-run utilities' auctions, sharply curtailing their opportunities to win orders.

<http://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Trends/China-hands-death-sentence-to-75-of-solar-cell-makers>

Date Accessed: 06.01.2014
(Mahima Malik)

AFRICA

UN: Half of Central African Republic Needs Aid

(Peter James Spielmann, ABC News, January 7, 2014)

This article highlights the implications of the ongoing ethnic war between the Christian majority and Muslim rebels in Bangui. The Central African Republic has been plunged into chaos as the country's majority seeks revenge against the rebels, who seized power in a coup in March.

U.N. officials warned the Security Council that Central African Republic was on the brink of a catastrophe, with half the population made homeless. According to UN officials, about 2.2 million people throughout Central African Republic need assistance.

About half the people of Bangui have been driven from their homes, a total of about 513,000, U.N. Political Affairs Chief Jeffrey

Feltman said. About 100,000 are jamming a makeshift camp at the airport near the capitol. "Killings in Bangui and the rest of the country continue every day, and the population remains divided along religious affiliation," Feltman said. In December the Security Council authorized a multinational African peacekeeping force, which is expected to increase its troop strength from about 2,500 to 3,500, to keep a lid on the violence.

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/half-central-african-republic-aid-21440025>

Date Accessed: 7.1.2014
(Divashri Mathur)

EUROPE

Green Primaries to give 16 year olds chance to vote

(The Economic Voice, January 6, 2014)

The Green Party has stood by its proposal for vote to anyone over the age of 16. The Green Primary, a groundbreaking Europe-wide e-democracy project currently underway, offers anyone living in the European Union over the age of 16 the opportunity to vote for the two Green leading candidates for the 2014 European Elections. The winners of the Green Primary will be in the running to become the next European Commission President.

The European Green Primary functions similarly to the presidential primaries in the US, whereby figures within the party run against one another in an open and public manner to win the candidacy. The Green Primary also engages disaffected voters or those potential voters who have become divorced from the traditional political process. Live debates have taken place or will be taking place in austerity-squeezed Greece and Spain showing these voters what the candidates stand for and how voting Green could help them.

Natalie Bennett, leader of the Green Party of England and Wales, said "It will be the first-ever pan-European

primary election, a chance for 16 and 17-year-olds to influence a vote from which they are otherwise excluded, and we hope will provoke a wide debate not just about the contenders but about the possibility of giving citizens a much broader say in European decision-making. This primary is an experiment in extending European democracy well beyond its former limits."

<http://www.economicvoice.com/green-primaries-to-give-16-year-olds-chance-to-vote/>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014
(Mahima Malik)

OPINIONS

Education should be a priority in 2014

(Meeta W Sengupta, *The Pioneer*, January 01, 2014)

The writer of article Meeta W Sengupta argues that, “education is both personal and societal and the better education levels lead to prosperity and health. That is why, decisions made by elected policy makers affect the present and future of an entire generation. Educationists have to acknowledge, in the recent past, investments in education have not influenced voting patterns. In this election year she wanted to bring education on the voter’s agenda.” Explaining the gap between education policy such as RTE act 2009 and ground realities she suggest following three top policy decisions for politicians and policymakers in education.

1. Capacity building- While the previous few years have been about increasing physical capacity in education, soft infrastructure is lagging. Teachers, faculty in higher education, leaders, researchers etc are in short supply. The constraint is both due to quality as well as structural failures.
2. Rethinking massification- The current policies aim at very high gross enrolment ratios in higher education. While this is a good driver of the pipeline, it is also true that the upstream leaks in the pipeline are huge, and the downstream opportunities (jobs) for graduates are very few.
3. Rethinking governance- While it is believed that education is a public good, it may be wise to rethink how the responsibility of this should be discharged. Does the Government have to be in the business of supplying education or should it be the mentor and monitor?

“Policymakers need to rethink these questions in this New Year when balancing political imperatives with long term goals.”

<http://www.dailypioneer.com/columnists/oped/education-should-be-a-priority-in-2014.html>

Date Accessed: 08.01.2014

(Jeet Singh)

How to accurately measure the effectiveness of Fiscal Policy during a deep recession

(Mark Thomas, *The Fiscal Times*, January 7, 2014)

Different economic thoughts suggest different opinions on the question of, “how to judge the effectiveness of fiscal policy?” Fiscal policy is considered to be of immense importance during deep recessions and a correct technique to appraise the effectiveness of a fiscal policy therefore, gains relevance. The article suggests that the correct way to measure the true relevance/ effectiveness of a fiscal policy is testing it through a macroeconomic model and consider the question: “**what would have happened had the policy not been enacted and then comparing it to the actual economic outcome with the policy in place.**” The writer suggests that the outcome should be tested through an economic discipline known as **cliometrics**, which deals with developing macroeconomic models and tests a hypothesis most objectively. It is suggested that studying economic history, through cliometrics, gives the best answer to test the final relevance of fiscal policy. Cliometrics is a discipline which uses rigorous theoretical and statistical analysis to answer historical questions. Other widely used measures, like linking the effect of a policy to the outcome, give hasty conclusions.

The general argument made against fiscal policy is that since the

economy didn’t crash after “the sequester”, and since unemployment remained relatively high after the stimulus package, it must be that fiscal policy doesn’t work. The article explains that such ad hoc analysis have a baseline that is simply assumed rather than derived from a rigorous model, unlike cliometrics. The counter question to the ad hoc, hasty conclusion is, should also be considered: “**how do we know that unemployment would not have been even higher without this fiscal policy action from Congress?**” “The analysis of the effectiveness of policy must rely upon a comparison of an actual outcome to a hypothetical baseline alternative, and it’s best if the assumptions underlying the baseline estimates are out in the open – hence the need for models and transparent assumptions.”

In conclusion, it says that considering the tools given by cliometrics- the evidence on the effectiveness of fiscal policy in deep recessions is quite favourable.

<http://www.thefiscaltimes.com/Columns/2014/01/07/How-Tell-If-Fiscal-Policy-Works>

Date accessed: 07.01.2014

(Mahima Malik)

BOOKS

The pros and cons of aid to developing economies

(Kenneth Rogoff, *The Guardian*, January 6, 2014)

The article discusses the recent book by Angus Deaton of Princeton University, wherein the author argues that western aid services, in many cases, might lead to worsening conditions for nations. He states further that existing indicators assessing and shaping implementation of aid policy, although useful, still lack precision.

In his book-‘The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of

Inequality'-the author points out that there remains a void in terms of data regarding the location where the concentration of poor is greatest despite the fact that at least a billion people continue to live in desperate circumstances resembling conditions that prevailed hundreds of years ago.

Deaton presents a critique of the "hydraulic model" of aid that believes in increasing aid to amplify better results. He argues that it ignores the fact that funds are often fungible.

The author points out that inflows into one economic sector – typically oil or minerals – drive up economy-wide prices (including the exchange rate), rendering other sectors uncompetitive. He states further that most of this aid is delivered in kind and for strategic reasons to support ineffective and kleptocratic governments.

Deaton observes that while highly targeted western aid can be helpful, they need not interfere with political and social forces, which have the potential to generate organic and long-lasting solutions. He cites the example of India and China, who have managed to lift millions of people out of poverty with comparatively little western aid, to substantiate his point.

<http://www.theguardian.com/business/economics-blog/2014/jan/06/pros-cons-aid-developing-economies>

Date Accessed: 07.01.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

China and Socialism: Market Reforms and Class Struggle

by *Martin Hart-Landsberg and Paul Burkett*

Hart-Landsberg and Burkett's '*China and Socialism*' argues that market reforms in China are leading away from the socialist model of growth and towards a capitalist development path. This path is characterized with enormous social

and political costs, both domestically and internationally. "The transition to the market has been based on rising unemployment, intensified exploitation, declining health and education services, exploding government debt, and unstable prices." Thus the authors are of the opinion that "the rapid economic growth that accompanied these market reforms have not been due to efficiency gains, but rather to the erosion of a socialist infrastructure that made possible a remarkable degree of equality."

<http://monthlyreview.org/press/books/pb1234/>

Date Accessed: 13.01.2014

(Karishma Mutreja)