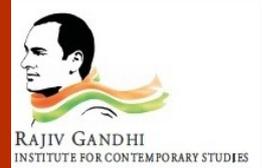


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ISSUE

RGICS POLICY WATCH



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Upcoming Seminars

Cutting Edge Series: New
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Other Products

- Legislative brief on National Identification authority India Act, 2010
- Background Paper on Protection of Street Vendors

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- Clarify stand on UIDAI structure: Supreme Court
- Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) approved as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)
- Public health spending in India among lowest globally: Report

Disclaimer: The articles are summaries of the original article and the headlines have been changed in certain cases. For the original articles please click on the link given below the article.

HOUSING IN INDIA: ISSUES & POLICY INITIATIVES



Source: The Hindu, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/migration-slowing-population-growth-declining/article5084777.ece>

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Key Message

Policy Watch is a key instrument of RGICS's vision and strategy.

RGICS's core vision is opening up the Indian state to peoples' voice -- in its legislative, executive and judicial functions.

Elected representatives and political parties have a central responsibility in channeling peoples' voice into the functioning of the State. In turn, this requires enhancing the knowledge and capacity of elected representatives and political parties on State policy.

Policy Watch informs elected representatives and other political leaders about key policy developments nationally and globally. This will enable them to intervene in policy decision making and reflect people's voice.

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Team RGICS

HOUSING IN INDIA: ISSUES & POLICY INITIATIVES

Introduction: Housing in India

Housing is a basic human need like food and clothing. Investments in the housing sector, across the entire spectrum from luxury housing to low income housing, contributes to economic growth. This has been demonstrated across the world in developed as well as developing economies. Housing has also been termed as the *“Engine of Equitable and Balanced growth for the country”* and is recognized as an important contributor to development and civil life.

The house building industry is a major employer with strong and large multiplier effects.

Housing is 2nd largest employment generation industry, next to agriculture in India.

The housing sector in India is ranked 4th as per multiplier effect in terms of income generation ahead of agriculture and transport.

Mortgage lending has significantly contributed to the growth in housing production (construction) and housing consumption activities. Outstanding mortgage debt in the country accounts for 9% of India's GDP.

Further indirect impact of housing is in terms of improved living, habitat, educational, social and cultural standards leading to human capital formation which further results in improved quality of life and future earning capabilities. Housing as an asset provides an important source of income for livelihoods of all the members of the households. The house value is important collateral for contracting other loans, that improve the earning and repayment capacity of the borrower. All these together lead to improved productivity, further leading to enhanced income and savings and repayment potentials on sustainable lines.

Issues concerning Housing in India

Though affordability of housing has improved in the country, it continues to remain the most critical aspect of housing for vast segment of the population due to steep rise witnessed in the prices of real estate.

The rapid pace of urbanization owing to rural-urban migration is putting a strain on urban infrastructure in the cities of India and has led to substantial housing shortage. The technical group on housing shortage has estimated the housing shortage in urban India at 18.78 million with 95% shortage in EWS/ LIG segment in 2012.

There is looming housing shortage in rural India where 67% of country's population resides. The rural housing shortage is estimated at 43.9 million by the working group on rural housing shortage in 2012, out of which more than 90% of housing shortage lies with the lower income and marginalized group.

Lack of institutional and formal credit especially to the low income households and informal households has also contributed to increase in housing shortage. A survey by planning commission has shown that 66% of households in India construct homes using their own resources, 9% using institutional finance and remaining depend on non-institutional sources such as family, friends, money lenders etc.

Area of Focus : Urbanization

According to the 2011 census, urbanization has increased rapidly reversing the declining trend in the growth rate of urban population observed during the 80s and the 90s. A number of interventions are required at the state and city levels to cope up with the increasing pace of urbanization as the same is exerting tremendous pressure on housing, infrastructure and basic civic amenities. Rural- urban migration had led to an increasing need for housing in urban areas especially for the low income and economically weaker sections. Further proliferation of slums should be avoided through monitoring of land parcels in central areas and in-situ developments, particularly incremental housing for safe, secure and habitable settlements.

The managing of shortage in urban areas has been engaging the attention of the Government and the policy makers. To mitigate the housing shortage in urban areas, particularly among the lower income segments, the report suggests a multi-pronged approach covering inclusive cities, urban governance, funding, planning, capacity building and low income housing has to be taken.

Inclusive Cities: An inclusive city promotes growth with equity. It is a place where everyone regardless of their economic means, gender, race, ethnicity or religion, is enabled and empowered to fully participate in the social, economic and political opportunities that cities have to offer. Participatory planning and decision-making are at the heart of the inclusive cities.

Urban Governance: India's urban governance of cities needs an over-haul. India's current urban governance is in sharp contrast to large cities elsewhere that have empowered mayors with long tenures and clear accountability for the city's performance. There is a need to clearly define the relative of the metropolitan and municipal structures for the 20 largest metropolitan areas. With cities growing beyond municipal boundaries, having fully formed metropolitan authorities with clearly defined roles will be essential for the successful management of large cities in the country.

Funding: Decentralization has to be supported by more reforms in urban financing that will reduce cities' dependence on the centre and the states and unleash internal revenue sources. There are several sources of that Indian cities could tap into, such as monetizing land assets, higher collection of property taxes, central/state government funding etc. However, internal funding alone will not be enough, even in large cities. A portion has to come from the central and state governments. Assistance schemes such as JNNURM, Bharat Nirman can help in managing urbanization.

Planning: India needs to make urban planning a central, respected function, investing in skilled people, rigorous fact base and innovative urban form. This can be done through a "cascaded" planning structure in which large cities have 40 year and 20 year plans at the metropolitan level that are binding on municipal development plans.

Local Capacity Building: A real step-up in the capabilities and expertise of urban local bodies will be critical to devolution and improvement of service delivery. Reforms will have to address the development of professional managers for urban management functions, who are in short supply and will be required in large numbers. New innovative approaches will have to be explored to tap into the expertise available in the private and social sectors. There is a need for building technical and managerial depth in the city administrations. A top-up rather than a bottom-down approach can lead to more effective administration with the involvement of the base of the pyramid in improving services in cities.

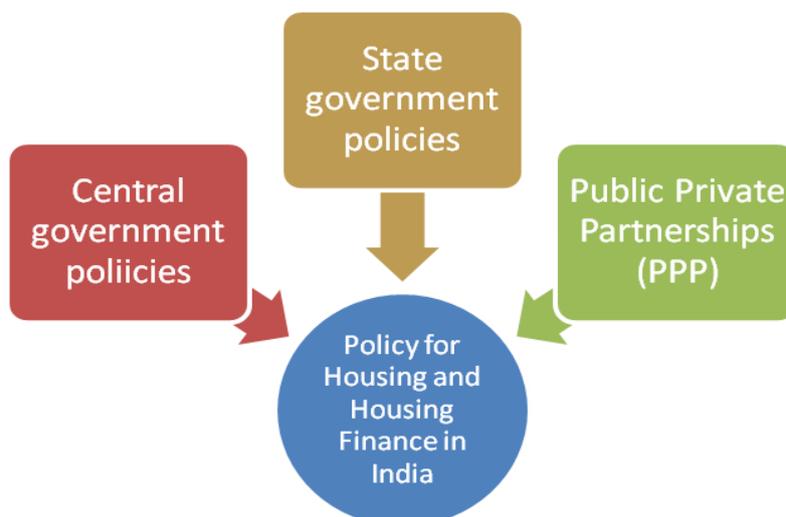
Affordable Housing: Affordable housing is a particularly critical concern for low-income groups. In the absence of a viable model that caters to their needs, India can meet the challenge through a set of policies and incentives that will bridge the gap between price and affordability. This will enable a sustainable and economically viable affordable housing model for both government housing agencies and as well as private developers. There is also a need to encourage rental housing as an option particularly for the poorest of the poor, who may not be able to afford a home even with these incentives. The housing has to be partnered with water and sanitation facilities so as to encourage hygiene and provide a better quality of life to people.

The establishment of the Urban Housing Fund in the Union Budget of 2013-14 is a step towards addressing the problem. With increasing urbanization, the need for development of innovative techniques for low cost construction as well as innovative financing is felt so concepts like "Green Homes", "Home Automation", "Pre-fabricated Structures" are gradually gaining grounds as they are not only sustainable housing practices but also cut down bills and encourage the use of renewable energy sources.

National Housing Board has also come up with two Special Refinance Schemes to promote Greener Homes viz, the Refinance Scheme for Energy Efficient Housing and the Refinance Scheme for Installation of Solar Water Heating and Solar Lighting Equipments in Homes.

Current Policy for Housing and Housing Finance in India

The central and state government has introduced a number of schemes to promote affordable housing amongst the weaker and lower income segments of the population. The schemes are aimed at augmenting the housing supply for the masses through an enabling and supportive framework for easy and accessible credit to these people.



Central Government Housing Schemes

The GOI has played an important role in providing housing to the masses through various schemes and policies. It has been funded under various 5 year plans through the years.

Schemes & Policies of Central Government	Objective of the policy/ scheme
The National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy (NUHHP), 2007	The focus is provision of Affordable Housing for All with special emphasis on vulnerable sections of society such as Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribes, Backward classes, Minorities and Urban poor.
Central Registry of Securitization Asset Reconstruction and Security Interest of India (CERSAI)	The objective is to maintain and operate a registration system for the purpose of registration of transactions of securitization, asset reconstruction of financial assets and creation of security interest over property.
Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)	It was launched in collaboration with various state government and local bodies, supports 63 cities across the country. It focuses on improving efficiency in urban infrastructure, services delivery mechanism, community participation and accountability of urban local bodies.
Indira Awas Yojana	It focuses on the provision of cash subsidy to rural BPL families for construction of dwelling units using their own design and technology. The funding is shared by centre and state in the ratio of 75:25 respectively.
Interest Subsidy Scheme for Housing the Urban Poor (ISHUP)	Under the scheme, an interest subsidy of 5% pa for whole duration of loan is provided on loans up to Rs. 1 lakh extended to EWS/ LIG beneficiaries by Primary Lending Institutions. The interest subsidy was provided on NPV and upfront basis.
1% Interest Subvention Scheme	Under the scheme, an interest subsidy of 1% is offered on housing loans up to Rs. 15 lakh, with the cost of dwelling units not exceeding Rs. 25 lakh.
Credit Risk Guarantee Fund Trust for Low Income Housing	Benefits to lenders and borrowers under the scheme Lenders: Credit risk will be transferred to the trust, further reduction in their risk weighted assets. Borrowers: Provision of guarantee under the fund trust will enhance the credit worthiness of borrower and in addition, will get loans at low rates due to reduced risk and lesser capital requirements for lenders.

Public Private Partnership (PPP)

PPP is an arrangement between government and private sector entities for the purpose of providing public infrastructure, community facilities and related services. The government endeavors to promote PPP through facilitative policies.

NUHHP-2007 seeks to promote various types of PPP for realizing the goal of “Affordable Housing for All” with special emphasis on urban poor. The state housing policies of states including Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have various provisions for facilitating accelerated PPPs. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation has introduced guidelines for affordable housing in partnership under the JNNURM.

The common theme across all the state housing policies is the focus on the role played by various stakeholders and to encourage and catalyze partnership amongst all the players in the public, private, cooperative, formal and informal sectors. Looking ahead a clear transformation and up scaling of the role and contribution of different players in the sectors is visible.

Box Item 3- Union Budget Announcements: 2013-14

The Union Budget for the year 2013-14 was announced on 28th February 2013 by Hon'ble Finance Minister. The budget had various announcements pertaining to the housing and housing finance sector which are as summarized below:

- Additional deduction of interest upto ₹ 1 lakh for a person taking first home loan upto ₹ 25 lakh during period 1.4.2013 to 31.3.2014. Interest subvention of 1 percent continued
- All Regional Rural Banks and cooperative banks to be e-linked by this year-end
- National Housing Bank (NHB) to set up Urban Housing Bank Fund and ₹ 2,000 crore will be allocated in this regard
- ₹ 6,000 crore to be allocated for Rural Housing Fund in 2013-14
- TDS at the rate of 1 per cent on the value of the transfer of immovable properties where consideration exceeds ₹ 50 lakh. Agricultural land to be exempted.
- For homes and flats with a carpet area of 2,000 sq.ft. or more or of a value of ₹ 1 crore or more, which are high-end constructions, where the component of services is greater, rate of abatement reduced from 75 to 70 percent.
- Securitization Trusts exempted from Income Tax.
- Existing exemptions from service tax for low cost housing and single residential units will continue in 2013-14

Conclusion

Though the housing sector in India has multiple linkages with the industries, the outstanding housing loans as a percentage of GDP have remained at around 9% in the country, significantly lower than the levels achieved in most of the advanced economies. With improving demographics and economies of scale, the mortgage to GDP ratio is likely to increase as it offers a strong business case for both lenders and builders.

The demand for housing and the availability of the retail housing credit has seen sustained growth. However, the supply responses are somewhat muted and do not adequately reflect the nature of growing demand amongst specific segments characterizing the housing shortage in our country. This needs appropriate policy interventions at both the state and centre level on the supply side, combined with flexible and innovative financing mechanisms.

References: Report, ‘Report on trend and progress of Housing in India, 2013’, National Housing Bank, Accessed from: <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/file/Progress-report-2013-ENGLISH.pdf>
(Anjana John & Shruti Issar)

Clarify stand on UIDAI structure: Supreme Court

(Business Standard, February 5, 2014)

The Supreme Court asked the government to clarify the structure of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to ascertain the legal validity of the agreements UIDAI had entered into with states. The apex court concurred with the joint review committee's view that giving legal migrants UID numbers was not misplaced and in fact could help keep a check on them.

About 10 state governments, the petroleum ministry, oil marketing companies and UIDAI are a party to the petition. The Bench, headed by B S Chauhan, discussed the following issues in a hearing on joint review petition filed by government agencies:

The status of UIDAI working as a government agency was mooted: It was argued that "UIDAI was a government agency or a body corporate". However, in rebuttal, the Court asked, "if that was the case, why were the contracts not in the name of the president?" Representative of one of the petitioners claimed that "UIDAI was collecting biometric and demographic data without any statutory backing." UIDAI had entered into memoranda of understanding with state governments.

There is no legal basis: In case of any misuse or foul play, the enrolling agencies couldn't be legally held liable. He added that no protection of the "demographic" data being collected by "private" operators could lead to misuse of the data "commercial gains."

The court also sought distinction between UIDAI and the Home Ministry's National Population Register project. It made the crucial comment that if "Aadhaar is permissible for citizens, it should also be for non-citizens".

The next hearing is slated for February 11 this year.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/clarify-stand-on-uidai-structure-sc-114020401166_1.html

Date Accessed: 02.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) approved as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS)

(Press Information Bureau, February 05, 2014)

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the launch of the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), to be implemented in Mission mode during 2013-2022. For effective implementation of the scheme, the emphasis is given on the following:

“(i) Community should be involved at every stage, from planning through implementation and post-project maintenance leading to community ownership and sustainability of the scheme.

(ii) For effective monitoring central assistance is available for components such as establishment of technical cells at both State and City levels, cost of preparation of Slum Free City Plans of Action(SFCPoA) including preparatory activities, preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPR), Third Party Inspection and Monitoring (TPIM) and Social Audit.

(iii) Monitoring of quality of projects executed by the implementing agencies by Third Party Inspection and Monitoring Agency (TPIMA) at both Central and State level.”

“The Minister further stated that this Ministry has also issued guidelines for Community Participation, Guidelines for Social Audit and DPR preparation for effective implementation of the scheme. The scheme is applicable to all

cities/UAs of the country. The selection for seeking assistance under the scheme is to be made by the States in consultation with the Centre. The cities/UAs covered under preparatory phase of RAY are automatically included under implementation phase of RAY.”

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=103060>

Date Accessed: 06.02.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

Public health spending in India among lowest globally: Report

(V Sanjeev Kumar, *The Hindu Businessline*, January 31, 2014)

As per a report launched by Accenture, India ranks among the bottom five countries with the lowest public health spending globally. The report titled, *Delivering e-health in India — Analysis and Recommendations*, points out that the Indian healthcare system continues to suffer from underfunding and poor governance thus creating significant inequities in providing basic healthcare.

The report points out that the country has invested less public money in health than most comparable countries, though healthcare expenditure has increased considerably. Substantial gaps in healthcare infrastructure, low healthcare insurance service coverage and inadequate medical manpower are the major challenges hampering the growth of the healthcare sector.

The report identifies the importance of shifting from ‘infrastructure focus to productivity focuses’ for improvements in India’s healthcare access. This can only be achieved if larger fund allocation for healthcare is accompanied by effective and innovative interventions to improve the system to achieve global standards. Further, industry experts state that comprehensive adoption of IT and digitisation of systems to improve access to these services is central to improving the productivity of the overall healthcare system. This includes implementing hospital information systems and digitisation of records, automation of supply chain, empowering citizens through information dissemination, handheld based data collection.

Industry experts have also stressed on the need for the public sector to play a major role and that the government should act as a ‘facilitator and a catalyst’ with friendly and sustainable business models order for a win-win situation for all stakeholders, including the patients. They further state that the need of the hour is Government intervention through people-friendly policies to set up infrastructure support to provide better healthcare access throughout the patient’s lifecycle.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/report-public-health-spending-in-india-among-lowest-globally/article5638330.ece>

Date Accessed: 04.02.2014

(Deepti Somani)

NABARD sanctions Rs 1,112 cr for creation of 1,336 warehouses in 7 states

(Business Standard, February 4, 2014)

The Project Sanctioning Committee of NABARD has sanctioned Rs 1,112 crore for creation of 1,336 warehouses in various states. The state government corporations in Haryana, Kerala, Punjab, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and West Bengal, which will create 7.5 lakh MT of additional storage space.

Cumulatively, NABARD created an additional capacity of 16.3 million MT as against 35 million MT intended to be established under 12th Five Year Plan," as per, NABARD Chairman Dr Harsh Kumar Bhanwala.

NABARD has been giving fillip to creation of warehousing infrastructure in rural areas in order to meet additional storage requirements on account of the National Food Security Act, 2013 as well as for better market access and liquidity support.

NABARD warehousing was introduced in 2013-14 as with a corpus of Rs 5,000 crore. The scheme envisages financial support for warehouses, godowns, silos, cold storages and cold chain infrastructure to store agricultural produce both in the public and private sectors.

The warehouses funded by NABARD are mandated to conform to the accreditation standards of Warehouse Development Authority which will facilitate better liquidity to farmers through Negotiable Warehouse Receipts. The warehouses funded under the scheme relates to storage of food grains for public distribution system, storage of both, food grains and commercial crops as well as storage infrastructure in Kisan bazaars and APMCs.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/nabard-sanctions-rs-1-112-cr-for-creation-of-1-336-warehouses-in-7-states-114020401256_1.html

Date Accessed: 5.2.2014

(Shruti Issar)

Manufacturing weakest in North-Eastern states: report

(LiveMint, February 03, 2014)

West Bengal, Bihar and the north eastern states have performed the poorest in a new ranking of manufacturing competitiveness, released by the Institute of Competitiveness.

The report states that "States with the weakest manufacturing competitiveness mainly rely on the primary factor endowments— mainly unskilled labour and natural resources. The significant pillars for such states are transportation infrastructure, uptake of labour, basic education facilities and a decently stable business environment." The pillars relate to policy actions that would raise productivity in states with low manufacturing competitiveness.

Contribution of India's manufacturing sector has remained at 15-16% in the past two decades. The government aims in its strategic manufacturing policy to raise this to 25% and create 100 million jobs by 2022. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Haryana and Punjab have the highest manufacturing competitiveness, the report found.

The rankings are based on a study of 28 Indian states and Delhi through indicators that are associated with the highest manufacturing output per person in the working age population.

The report states that indicators such as rail and road connectivity, growth of manufacturing output, share of small enterprises, access to credit and capital to labour ratio are chosen to reflect regulatory structure, business environment, technology sophistication and skills of the workforce which intends to initiate changes at the state and central level policymaking relating to the manufacturing sector. It pointed out that "presence of clusters, gross output per firm, value added per worker, investments, technology sophistication and a proper system of patents" had raised the productivity of manufacturing units in western economies.

However, the report did not include indicators related to labour laws, which are often pointed to as reasons for the stagnation in the manufacturing sector's contribution to growth. Economists have argued that unless labour laws are reformed, investments will not come and manufacturing will not grow.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/nq0myWbcZQrlwXFTtDwZHJ/Manufacturing-weakest-in-north-eastern-states--Report.html>

Date Accessed: 04.02.2014
(Deepti Somani)

BRICS in slowdown; how India can buck the trend

(Aditya Puri, *Economic Times*, February 7, 2014)

The BRICS nations were touted to lead the world's economy and contribute to more than 14 percent of the global GDP but the recent growth figures are showing a different picture. "In 2006-07 India came within a whisker of double-digit growth and the US was growing at 3%. In 2014, US is expected to grow at 3% while India would not dare to predict a rate anywhere over 5-5.5%. In short the growth differential has compressed by a hefty 4 percentage points."

The developed countries like Europe and Japan along with US are regaining their position in the world economy. The dollar is expected to strengthen and as a result emerging economy stocks and currency will fall and consequently commodity prices should stabilise or rise. In this process, the developed world is heavily dependent on the growth of the emerging markets.

India can hugely advantage in such a scenario. China is slowing down sharply and could possibly clock a growth rate of below 7% this year. Rising wages are whittling its competitive edge and undermining its position as a manufacturing powerhouse. This means that international investors are likely to look at alternatives like India to relocate manufacturing bases. Thus the potential for attracting substantially more foreign direct investment is large.

This is an opportunity for India to improve its status as an investment destination. GST can be one of the reforms that may help India since the implementation of a new tax dispensation is good for growth and revenue buoyancy. Resolving of delays in sectors like power and roads can also increase the productivity of the nation. Most important of all India needs to increase its expenditure on health and education. The remedy is a combination of increased spending in these critical sectors, enhanced efficiency of spending and greater collaboration between private and public sectors to find viable solutions.

http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2014-02-07/news/47126616_1_gdp-growth-forecasts-double-digit-growth-brics

Date Accessed: 10.02.2014
(Simi Sunny)

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Centre mulling to set uniform rates for CNG distribution in states

(Down To Earth, February 4, 2014)

After reducing the price of CNG by 30 per cent in Delhi, the Centre is mulling to set a uniform price for CNG to be distributed in states as well. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) is in favour of making CNG affordable that will make a major contribution in cutting down atmospheric pollution in cities.

This move is in line with the recommendations of the of the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) post 2002 order of the Supreme Court that proposed favourable fuel taxation policy for effective price differentiation between CNG and diesel. This has health implication as well which is indicated by the findings of the World Health Organization and International Agency for Cancer Research that reveal diesel emissions to be class I carcinogen for their strong proven link with lung cancer.

Bus corporations in Delhi, Mumbai and other cities have been facing major difficulties in making massive investments to phase in CNG bus programme in the wake of increasing CNG prices. Subsequent rise in rates lead to steady erosion of mass commuters of public vehicles, thereby creating huge discontent amidst masses.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/cng-price-slashed-rs-15-delhi-cse-lauds-centres-decision>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

DTH scheme to give money directly to beneficiaries

(DD NEWS, February 04, 2014)

After the direct benefit transfer project, the Government is now planning to usher in a Direct-To-Home (DTH) scheme to plug leakages and handover pensions, work wages and other entitlements directly to beneficiaries across the country.

Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh said the scheme has been initiated in Andhra Pradesh and the need to bring out such a programme was thought as the government was witnessing that funds of welfare schemes were getting "leaked" rather than reaching legitimate beneficiaries. "It's not a question of money. It's a question of changing the system of delivery and what we have started in the last one year is a fundamental reform of the welfare delivery system involving banks and post offices", he said.

DTH scheme will use micro-ATMs, Modern technology and mobile connectivity to transfer government benefits directly to the legitimate beneficiary of various welfare programmes. Mr Ramesh said, "In about two years time all wages, all pensions, all maternity benefits, all subsidy schemes meant for the people will actually be delivered electronically not to the bank account or the post office but directly to the family".

<http://www.ddinews.gov.in/National/National%20-%20Headlines/Pages/ramsh.aspx>

Date Accessed: 04.02.2014

(Jeet Singh)

DEVELOPMENT

Scheme for timely supply of food grains launched in Karnataka

(Business Standard, February 02, 2014)

The Karnataka government's ambitious food security scheme 'Padithara Khathi' that ensures delivery of food grains at fair price shops on specific dates under the public distribution system has been rolled out in the State. Under this scheme, BPL (below poverty line) cardholders can obtain their quota of food grains from ration shops between the first and tenth day of each month.

Under the scheme, shops have to be kept open from 8 am to 8 pm with one hour lunch break from 1 pm and 2 pm. After the tenth day of the month, the shops can return to original timings of 8 am to noon and 4 pm to 8 pm when those who have not drawn their ration on the first ten days can obtain their quota.

The scheme initially covers rice and sugar. Ration shop owners have to make the food grains available to cardholders at the rates and quantity notified by the Government or face action under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

Cardholders can complain to gram panchayat, taluk level officers or tahsildars. Officials have stated that committees including cardholders would be set up in all the fair price shops in the district to ensure proper ration distribution and avoid any problems and steps will be taken to open a service centre in each ward for taking photos for ration cards.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/scheme-for-timely-supply-of-food-grains-launched-114020200721_1.html

Date Accessed: 04.02.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Govt. asks broadcasters to sensitize audience about North East Indians

(Indian Television, February 05, 2014)

In light of the rising instances of bias against the North Eastern community, the Home Ministry has sent a letter to various broadcasting bodies in the country asking them to sensitise the TV audiences about the culture of the North East.

Since the seven states of North East India don't get much prominence on the channels, the Ministry has requested them to come up with programmes centred on NE citizens and culture. For now, the letters have been sent out to the various broadcasting bodies such as the News Broadcasters Association and the Indian Broadcasting Federation. They will have to think about whether or not they would want to take up the suggestion by the Ministry.

The Ministry is of the opinion that the migrated population from the region 'might be getting treated differently due to their different culture' that include their typical physical features, culture, food habits and dressing sense. It has also advised the news channels to send journalists to the NE region to cover its issues and also increase interaction with those who have migrated to different cities.

Broadcasters, however, claim that from a business point of view, it is too expensive to cover the region. Since the TV ratings agency TAM does not cover the entire region, except few parts of Assam, it becomes difficult to keep a tab on TVTs and the area doesn't have many advertisers, except for few tea brands.

<http://www.indiantelevision.com/television/tv-channels/news-broadcasting/govt-asks-broadcasters-to-sensitise-audience-about-north-east-indians-140205>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Deepthi Somani)

Empowered Committee for MDMS Stresses on Quality, Hygiene and Safety Aspects

(Press Information Bureau, February 04, 2014)

Empowered Committee for Mid Day Meal in its first meeting, presided over by Human Resources Development Minister Dr. M. M. Pallam Raju, decided to place more emphasis on quality, hygiene and safety aspects of the mid day meal.

The Committee noted an increase in the coverage of children under the Mid Day Meal Scheme from 104.6 million children in 2010-11 to 106.7 million children in 2012-13. Appreciating an increase in coverage in the States of Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, the Committee exhorted the States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, J&K and Chhattisgarh to focus on the poorly performing districts.

“The Committee felt that appropriate steps need to be taken to enhance drinking water and sanitation facilities in all the schools in convergence with Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. The Scheme of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation for water supply to all the schools should be circulated to all the States. The Committee appreciated the steps being taken to promote hand washing in schools. The Committee also felt that there should be greater convergence with the Ministry of Health on the School Health Programme, through their Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram. Similarly, the Emergency Trauma services of the States should be utilized in case of any untoward incident in any school.”

The Committee also noted that “MDMS should ensure active participation of the School Management Committees and Panchayati Raj Institutions for effective implementation of the Scheme.”

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=103000>

Date Accessed: 06.02.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

GOVERNMENT

Government incentivising coastal shipping

(Exim News Service, February 3, 2014)

The Centre is prepared to spend around Rs 300 crore on incentives in order to encourage the movement of certain goods, from rail and road to coastal shipping, said, Capt. P. V. K. Mohan, Chairman of the National Shipping Board, Ministry of Shipping.

"We have identified nine commodities—steel, marbles, tiles, cement, automobiles, fertilisers, foodgrains, salt and sugar—for the incentive scheme. The scheme will be in force and under review till 2017," Capt. Mohan revealed.

The incentive of 50 paise per tonne per nautical mile up to a maximum of 500 nautical miles to all new cargoes would have a Rs 150 crore financial implication on the Ministry.

The Ministry had set up a committee under the Chairmanship of Capt. Mohan, to look into the issues of inland vessel (IV) limits, standards for coastal IVs and providing an incentive scheme for modal shift of cargo.

The Board had asked all the Major Ports and non-major ports and the nine maritime states to avail these schemes,

Capt. Mohan said. He said that 45 ships had already registered to ply under the new River Sea Vessels (RSV) rules, which were amended in July 2013.

<http://www.eximin.net/NewsDetails.aspx?name=74751>

Date Accessed: 5.2.2014

(Shruti Issar)

Aviation Ministry pushes for new sector regulator

(Debabrata Das and Binoy Prabhakar, *Economic Times*, February 5, 2014)

The aviation ministry is preparing to introduce legislation in the upcoming session of Parliament to create a new aviation regulator to replace the current authority, a largely toothless body that has been surrounded by various issues like staff shortage, after US regulators cut India's safety rating last week.

The ministry has accepted recommendations of a panel of MPs to strengthen the proposed Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), by giving it autonomy to create technical posts such as flight operations inspectors without having to turn to the government. One of the main reasons for the downgrade by the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was the failure of the current aviation regulator, directorate general of civil aviation (DGCA) to hire on a permanent basis an adequate number of flight operations inspectors trained for specific aircraft models, according to the aviation ministry official. The FAA, which audited DGCA in September and December, also found DGCA wanting in training its airworthiness officers to conduct safety checks on aircraft models used by non-scheduled operators (private jets, helicopters, chartered flights etc.).

The FAA action was a major setback to the overseas expansion ambitions of Indian carriers. A day after the downgrade, two of the US airlines suspended marketing ties with Jet Airways, India's second largest airline by passengers carried, which operates seven flights a week to the US.

The draft Civil Aviation Authority Bill was tabled in the Lok Sabha in August 2013 and the standing committee on transport, tourism and culture gave its recommendations in January. The US FAA's September 2013 audit had pointed to the lack of such technical officers in the DGCA. But a proposal to hire 75 new inspectors was cleared by the Cabinet only on January 20, a delay that meant India couldn't avert a downgrade. However while day-to-day functions of the current regulator, DGCA, will be subsumed by CAA, the chairman of the CAA will only be a part-time position. The everyday functioning of the new regulator will be overseen by the director-general of civil aviation, a post currently held by bureaucrat Prabhat Kumar.

<http://www.bulletin247.com/english-news/show/aviation-ministry-pushes-for-new-sector-regulator>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Neha Singh)

Kerala, TN among top 3 states to ask maximum questions in Parliament

(Saubhadra Chatterji, *Hindustan Times*, February 10, 2014)

“Latest data from PRS Legislative Research on the performance of MPs shows that the big southern states have once again beaten their big northern counterparts, this time in the performance of MPs in the Lok Sabha. In two key indicators — asking questions during the question hour and participation in debates including those on legislation — MPs from states like Tamil Nadu or Kerala performed better than those from states like Bihar or Uttar Pradesh in the past five years.

The MPs from northern states, however, have a better attendance record, with Rajasthan, Bihar and Delhi being the top three states. But officials point out that attendance in Parliament can be recorded on a register even without actually entering the House.

An interesting correlation can be drawn to the 'underdevelopment index' developed by the Raghuram Rajan panel last year according to which the southern states have consistently outperformed the northern states. While no southern state was listed among the 10 least developed states, six states from north India made it to the ignominious list.

In the 15th Lok Sabha, an average member took part in 36.8 debates. An MP from Kerala participated in an average of 67.8 debates. Maharashtra topped the list of average questions asked by MPs, followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu."

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/mps-report-card-south-outperforms-north-in-parliament-test/article1-1182376.aspx>

Date Accessed: 10.02.2014

(Karishma Mutreja)

Govt. to provide Rs. 1,400 crore loan subsidy for rural women self-help groups

(Economic Times, February 04, 2014)

The ministry of rural development has announced that it will shell out Rs 1,400 crore to provide subsidised loans to women self-help groups in rural India. The nearly 3% interest subvention given to women will be effective on loans of up to Rs 3 lakh taken after April 1, 2013. This decision is likely to benefit 3 crore women in 25 lakh selfhelp groups across the country.

The move would benefit a large number of women SHGs in Odisha, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. In the first phase, the ministry will provide loans to women self-help groups at the rate of 7 per cent against over 10 per cent market rate in the 150 identified naxal-affected districts, making it at par with crop loans to farmers.

This subsidy would be funded from the Rs 2,600-crore budgetary allocation to the ministry under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). However, in the remaining districts across the country, the women self-help groups would be compensated through rebate which will cost the ministry another Rs 750 crore, taking the total outgo on subsidised loans to Rs 1,400 crore.

According to officials, the idea is that they would get loan at market rate only, but if they pay it back promptly, the difference in the amount between the market rate and subsidised rate will be credited to the account of women SHGs. Officials state that the rates would be further lowered to 4 per cent for SHGs who repay the loan on time.

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-02-04/news/47004948_1_women-shgs-women-self-help-groups-nrlm

Date Accessed: 04.02.2014

(Deepti Somani)

EDUCATION

Male teachers to be shifted out of schools

(Tanveer Thakur , The Aisan Age, January 31, 2014)

This article highlights the response of the Punjab government to cases of sexual harassment in schools. The government has decided to shift male teachers from girls' senior secondary schools and instead bring in female teachers in their place.

In a recent diktat to the education department, state government had asked them to prepare the list of male teachers

teaching in girl's school. However after the widespread criticism of the decision there was some hope of government rethinking about the decision. On the contrary the state education department has shown to swiftness to implement the decision and already prepared a list of 42 male teachers to be transferred out of girl schools.

Following this Punjab could be the first state in the country where girl schools would be devoid of any male teachers. The state government defends its decision on the premise that the number of sexual harassment cases in the schools has been rising.

According to Punjab education minister Sikander Singh Maluka the decision has been taken after many complaints of sexual harassment in recent times. "Even parents have complaints of such cases against daughters by the male teachers. The problem would take some time to be resolved and we have asked the education department to prepare list of girl schools".

The state government of Punjab has decided to shift male teachers to nearby boys schools in the first phase and in the next phase they plan to depute several female staff in the vacant slots in girl schools.

<http://www.asianage.com/india/male-teachers-be-shifted-out-schools-706>

Date Accessed: 3.2.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

250 million school-age kids can't read: UN report

(Edith. M Lederer, *The New Indian Express*, February 02, 2014)

According to a report commissioned by the U.N. education agency, at least 250 million of the world's 650 million primary school-age children are unable to read, write or do basic mathematics. The report found that 130 million are in primary school but have not achieved the minimum benchmarks for learning, and almost 120 million have spent little or no time in a classroom including 57 million youngsters who are not attending school. The research team behind this report also calculated that the cost of 250 million children around the world not learning translates to a loss for governments of around \$129 billion annually. The report said that the global "learning crisis" is mainly caused by a lack of well-trained teachers, especially in impoverished areas. "While more children are in school, it's been at the cost of quality. Therefore the issue now is to put the focus on quality."

In a third of countries analyzed by the team, less than 75 percent of the primary school teachers had been trained to meet national standards. The report said that ensuring an equal, quality education can increase a country's gross domestic product per capita by 23 percent over 40 years. "But according to the report, almost half the children out of school globally are expected never to make it into a classroom — and that includes almost two-thirds of girls in Arab states and sub-Saharan Africa." The research team reported that almost half the world's out-of-school population of 57 million live in conflict-affected areas, up from 42 percent in 2008.

It estimated that 14 countries had more than one million children out of school in 2011 including Afghanistan, China, Congo, Somalia, Sudan before its break-up, and Tanzania. On the plus side, it said three countries reduced their out-of-school populations by at least 85 percent in the last five years — Laos, Rwanda and Vietnam.

http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/UN-250-Million-School-Age-Kids-Cant-Read/2014/02/02/article2033989.ece#_UvMoufmSyx9

Date Accessed: 03.02.2014

(Anjana John)

Public libraries to soon get a digital makeover

(*Firstpost*, January 30, 2014)

Intending to foster reading habits, facilitate research and make people information-fluent, public libraries across India are set to be digitised and revamped as part of the culture ministry plan under the National Mission on Libraries (NML).

Under the scheme, the NML will create a National Virtual Library (NVL) of India to facilitate a comprehensive database on digital resources. The scheme will also provide 629 district libraries across the states with network connectivity.

6 libraries under the ministry, 35 central libraries in states and 35 district libraries will be developed as model libraries under the scheme. Emphasis will be laid on economically backward districts. With an expenditure of Rs.400 crore, the Kolkata-based Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) has been roped in as the nodal agency for the implementation of NML.

<http://www.firstpost.com/fwire/public-libraries-to-soon-get-a-digital-makeover-1367407.html>

Date Accessed: 04.02.2014

(Deepti Somani)

HEALTH

Treatment alone will not win war on cancer: prevention is crucial, UN reports

(UN News Centre, February 3, 2014)

This article highlights the findings of the ‘World Cancer Report 2014’ launched by the specialized UN cancer agency on the eve of World Cancer Day (February 4). The report finds that new cancer cases worldwide are expected to rise from 14 million to 22 million per year within the next two decades, and annual cancer deaths will rise to 13 million.

According to Dr. Christopher Wild, the Director of the UN cancer agency, “More commitment to prevention and early detection is desperately needed in order to complement improved treatments and address the alarming rise in the cancer burden.” As an example of preventive strategies the report highlights the need for adequate legislation to reduce exposure and risk behaviours, citing the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Similar approaches need to be evaluated in other areas, notably consumption of alcohol and sugar-sweetened beverages, and in limiting exposure to occupational and environmental carcinogenic risks, including air pollution.

The study stressed that due to growing and ageing populations, developing countries are disproportionately affected by cancer, with more than 70 per cent of deaths occurring in Africa, Asia, and Central and South America. “Despite exciting advances, this report shows that we cannot treat our way out of the cancer problem,” Dr. Wild said, noting that the situation in the developing world is made worse by the lack of early detection and access to treatment.

The report notes that preventing the spread of tobacco use in low- and middle-income countries is crucial to cancer control. In addition, low-tech approaches (‘screen-and-treat’ programme) to early detection and screening have proven their efficacy in developing countries like India and Costa Rica.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47067&Cr=cancer&Cr1=#.UvDVivmSyVI>

Date Accessed: 3.2.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

ENVIRONMENT

Green Tribunal bans illegal coastal sand mining

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

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has ordered an immediate ban on all illegal sand mining in the coastal areas and those falling in the coastal regulation zone (CRZ). The order by a division bench of the NGT Western Zone will be applicable to Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa. Last year, the NGO called Awaaz Foundation had filed a complaint against illegal coastal sand mining and the existence of sand mafias in the coastal areas of Maharashtra before the NGT, Pune. The NGT has ordered an immediate ban on all sand mining in areas under the CRZ, especially in the coastal districts of the state -- Thane, Ratnagiri, Raigad, Sindhudurg and Navi Mumbai. The division bench has restrained the concerned authorities from issuing any further auction notices, granting mining licenses/permissions in the CRZ areas. The NGT has directed the concerned agencies to initiate stern action against the violators and file their respective status reports by March 11, the date of the next hearing.

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/Green-Tribunal-Bans-Illegal-Coastal-Sand-Mining/2014/02/05/article2039724.ece#.UvM0MvmSyx9>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Anjana John)

AGRICULTURE

Pressure on Farmland

(*The Hindu*, February 4, 2014)

The author argues for a comprehensive approach to land utilisation and need to address conflicting demand on land. The Ministry of Urban Development now wants to ease these restrictions, and the government has constituted a three-member Cabinet committee to look into it.

Currently there is a debate to consider FDI in agricultural land bought for real estate purposes. Existing Foreign Exchange Management Act regulations prohibit the use of FDI funds to buy farmland. But, real estate companies have tried to bypass these restrictions. Last year, the Enforcement Directorate imposed a fine of Rs. 8,600 crore on Emaar MGF for allegedly using foreign funds to buy agricultural land.

The reasoning behind the easing of FDI in agriculture is that 100 per cent FDI is already permitted in developing townships, housing and other infrastructure projects. Hence, it would be only logical to extend it and allow the purchase of agricultural land for construction purposes. The other arguments are that restrictions create bottlenecks and delay projects, and that buying of agricultural land on the outskirts of a city is inevitable and necessary. Relaxing FDI norms may appear to be a rational step, but in the absence of a clear-cut land use policy and plans, it will hasten unrestricted acquisition and unplanned conversion of farmland and lead to hoarding of land.

In 2013, the Ministry of Rural Development published a draft National Land Utilisation Policy. It convincingly argued that the shrinkage of per capita ownership of agricultural land and the demand to produce more food 245 million tonnes in 2013 to 307 million tonnes in 2020 — necessitates the protection of fertile land. The National Policy for Farmers, announced in 2007, insisted that the government conserve productive land and allow any change in use only under “exceptional circumstances.” These two policies make no distinction between foreign and local investment. The government has not acted on a recommendation to revive land use boards, which could provide guidelines to State governments. Nor has it implemented the idea of delineating and integrating land utilisation zones under the development plans. These measures are necessary to map the availability of land and coordinate demands for it.

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/pressure-on-farmland/article5649737.ece>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Neha Singh)

LABOUR

“Recognise Anganwadi volunteers as workers”

(The Hindu, February 04, 2014)

The National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) has demanded the recognition of Anganwadi and Asha volunteers as workers, from the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment.

The Ministry had recently rejected a recommendation by the Indian Labour Conference to accept them as workers noting that the women who work in these sectors are volunteers. “NFIW general secretary Annie Raja said around 50 lakh women work as Anganwadi workers and helpers, as ASHA workers, and as mid-day meal cooks all over the country.”

“They are the main functionaries and are the implementing agencies of the nation-building process by dedicating themselves to the efforts of the government in achieving the goals of reducing malnutrition, maternal mortality and infant mortality. On many occasions they work for more than 12 hours a day, but they are not getting even the minimum wages. This is nothing but slavery,” said Ms. Raja.

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-newdelhi/recognise-anganwadi-volunteers-as-workers/article5651183.ece>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

GENDER

Panel recommends 50% quota for women in decision-making bodies

(Aarti Dhar, *The Hindu*, February 03, 2014)

“Making out a strong case to formulate a National Policy and Action Plan to end violence against women, a government-appointed panel has recommended 50 per cent reservation for women in all decision-making bodies and an overhaul of the criminal justice system to ensure justice for women.”

The High Level 14-member Committee, headed by Pam Rajput, on the Status of Women in India in its preliminary report suggests that:

- A separate panel be appointed by the government to study the status of Muslim women in the country,
- “the Parliamentary Committee on the Empowerment of Women must examine the gender implications of all proposed legislation and the National Commission for Women...[it] must go beyond ‘reactive interventions’ to fulfil the proactive mandate of studying, recommending and influencing policies, laws, programmes and budgets to ensure full benefits to the stakeholders.”

“Focussing on the need to bring about major changes in the criminal justice system, the report suggests initiatives ranging from a more gender sensitive enforcement machinery to greater awareness of different legislation and their inter-connectedness, along with accountability for securing women’s rights.”

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/panel-recommends-50-quota-for-women-in-decisionmaking-bodies/article5649941.ece>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

REGIONAL

Keen on supplying electricity to Bangladesh: Tripura chief minister

(*The Statesman*, February 4, 2014)

Tripura is keen to supply at least 100 MW of electricity to power-starved Bangladesh as it has become a power surplus state. Chief minister Manik Sarkar said "We have already told the Indian government that Tripura is ready to supply at least 100 MW of electricity to Bangladesh. The central government can now inform this to Bangladesh government to initiate a formal process in this regard."

In a business summit in Agartala he said: "To supply power from Tripura to Bangladesh, only a nine km transmission line is required to be erected from (western Tripura's bordering village) Rabindranagar to connect with that country's electricity network." During his visit to Dhaka in 2012, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her desire to import power from Tripura.

The chief minister said that after the completion of commissioning of two mega power projects by June or July this year, at least 200 MW power would be surplus in Tripura. According to Mr Sarkar, Bangladesh has special attention towards the northeast. Hence, the Indian government should reciprocate positively this approach.

<http://www.thestatesman.net/news/37782-keen-on-supplying-electricity-to-b-desh-tripura-chief-minister.html>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Jeet Singh)

Odisha tribals demand Constitutional rights

(*News Track India*, February 03, 2014)

Tribal leaders and protesters in Odisha have blamed the Odisha government for not implementing important legislations, like Forest Rights Act, Forest Protection Act and the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, in their right spirit. Tribals claim that the state government has taken measures to dislocate the tribals and strip them off their tribals land, water and forest rights.

In the 1997 Samata Judgement, the Supreme Court “declared null and void the transfer of land in the Scheduled Areas for private mining and upheld the Forest Protection Act of 1980, which prohibits mining in reserved areas.” Despite existence of several laws for tribals and their issues being taken up by courts, the tribes claim that the government of Odisha deliberately ignored the judgment and deprived the tribals of their land and other resources. The tribals have been suffering under acute poverty, hunger and social unrest, massive displacement and disintegration in tribal areas.

According to the former chairperson of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Dilip Singh Bhuria, “according to the Constitution of the country, the governance of villages inhabited by Scheduled tribes should be given to the tribals.”

<http://www.newstrackindia.com/newsdetails/2014/02/03/102-Odisha-tribals-demand-constitutional-rights-at-Bhubaneswar-rally.html>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

Manipur highlights the dilemma in reporting in Conflict Areas

(*The Hoot*, February 3, 2014)

Caught between the State and rebel forces, media persons in Manipur are in fix with regard to reporting issues in conflict zones.

On one hand rebel groups such as People Liberation Army (PLA), Military Defence Force (MDF) -Thouba Group and so on pressurise and threaten the media to release new reports about them and their activities. On the other hand, state authorities accuse media persons of indulging in seditious and unlawful activities. Both the State and the underground groups try their best to use media to celebrate their causes and activities and refusal in this scenario invites threats and even violence.

Recently an Imphal based newspaper has been summoned by the NIA in a sedition case for publishing a picture of PLA that was banned two year ago. The editor of the newspaper argued that the picture showing a banner of the PLA was placed in some indeterminate spot at night.

The All Manipur Working Journalists Union (AMWJU) has submitted a memorandum to the Press Council of India’s (PCI) sub-committee on safety of journalists bringing the insecurity and vulnerability of Manipur media into light. However, a response is still awaited.

<http://www.thehoot.org/web/Perils-of-reporting-in-Manipur/7277-1-1-2-true.html>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Prevalence of 16 types of Cancer highest in Northeast states

(Bhusan Borthakur, *TheTimes of India*, February 05, 2014)

The high prevalence of the different forms of cancer in the North-eastern region is not new information. But due to increase in number of registered cases the region has reported highest prevalence of 16 forms of cancer in either men or women or both. “Cancer of the oesophagus, hypopharynx, tongue, mouth, stomach, colon, gall bladder, liver, prostate, cervix and ovaries are some of the forms that are widely prevalent.”

“This alarming situation is attributed to various aspects like high tobacco consumption, potentiated risk factors, and tendency to develop cancer related harms, the population’s susceptibility to long-term effects of tobacco and also because of late detection in most cases.”

“The Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2010 conducted by the Union ministry of health and family welfare reveals that 39.3 % of the adult population in Assam is addicted to tobacco. Of them, nearly 90% are tobacco chewers and 10% are smokers.” “This prevalence of cancer in the region is comparable to the Australian population, which suffers from skin cancer due to long exposure to the sun” said Bhibuti Bhusan Borthakur, medical superintendent B Borooah Cancer Institute. He further reported that urban Kamrup has recorded the highest prevalence of oesophagus cancer amongst men and breast cancer among women, while Mizoram has recorded the highest cases of oral cancer.

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2014-02-05/guwahati/47048456_1_world-cancer-day-cancer-awareness-b-borooah-cancer-institute

Date Accessed: 09.02.2014

(Junty Sharma Pathak)

NE to lead growth in 12th Plan

(*The Telegraph*, February 3, 2014)

According to sources, the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of north-eastern states grew by nearly 10 per cent during the Eleventh Plan (2007-2012) compared to eight per cent for the country as a whole.

One of the major factors that geared this growth is the region’s good agriculture sector performance, including horticulture, floriculture, fisheries, rubber and oil palm production.

The region looks promising in terms of deriving benefits from hydel projects. According to the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, it can earn Rs. 650-670 crores annually for every 1,000MW of capacity addition.

Other measures such as easing the visa regime, making transit arrangements, proliferation of trade routes and customs check posts will add to the region’s already healthy growth rate.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140204/jsp/frontpage/story_17897510.jsp#.UvImroaQYjx

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Bihar launches National Food Security Act in four districts

(*Bihar Times*, February 02, 2014)

Bihar became one of the first states to launch the National Food Security Act (NFSA), which guarantees food grains at nominal prices to those living below the poverty line. It was launched in four districts of the state.

Over 84 per cent of the rural BPL people and 74% of urban BPL population would be the beneficiaries of the scheme. It has been launched for Patna, Gopalganj, Purnea and Nalanda districts. It would be launched all over the state soon weeks when the Food Corporation of India would allocate the state food grains.

As per the Act, beneficiaries would get five kg of food grains every month—wheat at Rs. 2 per kg, rice at Rs. 3 per kg and coarse cereal at Rs one per kilo. Under NFSA, each beneficiary is a unit, unlike in targeted PDS, where the family is treated as a unit.

<http://www.bihartimes.in/Newsbihar/2014/Feb/newsbihar02Feb2.html>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2014

(Anjana John)

INDIA IN THE WORLD

Two lakh Indians likely to get US citizenship

(*Indian Awaz*, February 3, 2014)

United States President Barack Obama has signalled a potential compromise on the contentious issue of immigration reform that could provide a path to citizenship to 11 million people, including some two lakh 40 thousand Indians. The reform is currently being debated in the Congress.

In an Interview Mr. Obama argued that this would not only create jobs, but also give a boost to the US economy and also mentioned that if immigration reform are formed, it will add growth to US economy and reduce deficits.

He also mentioned that the ideological gap is narrowing between the Democrats and Republicans on the issue of immigration laws, signalling that a common consensus will be reached to achieve a fair deal this year. Indian-American Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, was in favour of strong Immigration reforms to let more people come into the country as they come for education and work legally and it is good for America.

http://theindianawaaz.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16645&catid=11

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Neha Singh)

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

80 per cent of need for Palliative Care is in low and middle income countries: WHO

(Kundan Pandey, *Down to Earth*, January 31, 2014)

In a joint study by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Worldwide Palliative Care Alliance (WPCA), it has been revealed that around 80 per cent of the need for palliative care is in low and middle-income countries.

The report elaborates that contrary to common thinking that associates palliative care only to cancer, other life threatening diseases like alzheimer's, other forms of dementia, cardiovascular diseases (excluding sudden deaths), cirrhosis of the liver, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, kidney failure, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) also require palliative care.

The report further states that the distribution of the need for such care across the globe is as follows-94 per cent in adults and 6 percent in children. The highest rate of people (per every 100,000 adults) in need of palliative care is, however, found in the higher income groups.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/palliative-care-not-available-majority-developing-countries-who>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Puzzle for emerging economies: stabilising fundamentals with slower growth today to aid future growth

(Mathew Phillips, *Quartz*, January 29, 2014)

The article highlights the need to focus on improving economic fundamentals in emerging economies. **Stabilising economic variables like inflation and currencies might cause slower economic growth today but will bring better future gains to these economies.** It argues that the traditional approach of Central Banks of tweaking the interest rate on investments- increasing interest rates to attract foreign capital cannot be a permanent solution to the increasing outflows of capital in emerging economies. Emerging markets are facing the economic difficulties because they have failed to sustain the confidence of foreign investors as safe and profitable destinations.

Central banks in emerging markets, like Turkey, India and, South Africa have been relying on traditional approach-of increasing interest rates - for greater capital inflows. A higher interest rate relative to other nations implies better return for investors who put their money into its currency. The developed countries, such as the Europe and the US, have followed the 'interest oriented approach'. Since the inception of financial crisis, inflows in emerging markets' stocks, corporate bonds and sovereign debt has gradually moved in favour of developing nations. This has happened because the crisis increased the interest rate in developed countries relative to that of developing nations, moving the parity condition to favour of the latter. However, interest rates in developed nations have started to rise which has directly hurt emerging markets. Additionally, many emerging economies have been facing political turmoil, which has further discouraged investments.

The actual reason behind outflow of money from emerging economies is that future growth prospects in these struggling economies looks bleak. And interest rate is only a short term and uncertain instrument to attract money. For example, Turkey' lira plummeted even as interest rates were more than doubled. The article concludes that "slower growth might be worth it, if stabilizing the currencies—and inflation—set the stage for a long-term economic climb."

<http://qz.com/172034/heres-the-gamble-emerging-markets-are-taking-when-they-fight-to-prop-up-their-currencies/>

Date accessed: 1.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

SOUTH ASIA

New Afghan law aims to silence women

(Emma Graham, *The Hindu*)

A significant amendment in an Afghanistan law, passed by the parliament but awaiting final nod from the president, "will allow men to attack their wives, children and sisters without fear of judicial punishment." Considering the reality that most violence targeted against women in the country is within the family, the change in the country's criminal prosecution code will " **make it nearly impossible to punish honour killings by fathers and brothers who disapprove of a woman's behaviour.**"

Afghanistan has made little progress in reforms that check violence against women. In 2009, widespread protests had led to the softening of "family law enshrining marital rape as a husband's right." But there have been continued shocking instances in the past that call out for an immediate reform in attitudes meted out towards Afghan women. In 2013, "Afghan Parliament blocked a law to curb violence against women and cut the quota for women on provincial councils, while the justice ministry floated a proposal to bring back stoning as a punishment for adultery."

Conservative forces in Afghanistan are on the rise. **The change in the law implies a "blanket ban" on relatives of an accused person from testifying against them.** The law also remains silent to address the major problem of "forced marriage and the sale or trading of daughters to end feuds or settle debt". Protests and campaigns have been

organised to block this change in the law.

Such regressive reforms in the country have discouraged international support from countries that had previously funded programs to improve justice and human rights.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/new-afghan-law-aims-to-silence-women/article5655919.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 02.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

India and Maldives to strengthen defence ties

(Defence News, February 05, 2014)

India and Maldives have discussed the ways to further strengthen military ties during the visit of Maldivian Chief of Defence Forces to India. During the visit, the two sides discussed ways to enhance defence ties including the steps needed for strengthening Maldivian armed forces.

Maldivian Defence Minister Mohamed Nazim had recently visited India and met his Indian counterpart when New Delhi had stated that it was committed to strengthening the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF). The two Defence Ministers had also discussed the training of Maldivian medical specialists in India and deputation of Indian armed forces medical specialists to Maldives to strengthen existing medical infrastructure.

“India has also opened its doors for all MNDF personnel to its armed forces medical institutions for major surgeries and serious illnesses. The two countries are also discussing measures to enhance interactions between the two armed forces and in this context, agreed to hold the next round of joint exercise this year.”

<http://minivannews.com/news-in-brief/india-maldives-discuss-military-ties-76940>

Date Accessed: 06.02.2014

(Anjana John)

Freedom of Speech remains a challenge in Myanmar

(Zee news, February 4, 2014)

In response to news reports alleging that the Myanmar military is covertly operating a chemical weapons factory in Pauk, the State authorities have arrested five journalists for revealing confidential information. The journalists have been charged under the Official Secrets Act that makes possession of classified information unlawful by any person.

Despite taking baby steps towards a democratic structure through a quasi-civilian government that came to power in 2011, freedom of speech remains a concern as media persons continue to be targeted and punished.

Cases of human rights violation by the army continue to occur and bringing these issues in the public domain remains a challenge for media specially when reporters are detained and imprisoned for revealing state secrets. There have been accusations against the State that chemical weapons were used against minority rebels in the northern state of Kachin last year in January.

Reacting to the situation, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) was of the opinion that weapons proliferation issues are central to Burma's political narrative. Consequently journalists should not be threatened or arrested for reporting on topics of national and international importance.

http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/myanmar-holds-journalists-over-chemical-weapons-report_909125.html

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

EAST AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

India seeks to boost connectivity with Asean nations

(Elizabeth Roche, *Live Mint*, January 31, 2014)

A senior foreign ministry official has noted that connectivity between India and the South East Asian Economies will be a priority as the latter grouping looks to coalesce into an economic community by 2015 while India tries to deepen linkages with it.

The idea of connectivity between India and countries of Southeast Asia is not new, Anil Wadhwa, secretary (east) in the ministry of external affairs said "It is today central to the Asean((Association of Southeast Asian Nations))-India partnership for progress and prosperity. Equally importantly, it is also of relevance to the maintenance of peace and security in the region," he noted that "two major developments are lending even greater urgency to our (India-Asean) connectivity agenda. One is the Asean march towards an Asean community by 2015, which will consolidate a market of more than 600 million people and a combined GDP of \$2.3 trillion."

"The second development is the consolidation of economic and commercial engagement between India and Asean through the FTA (free trade agreement) on trade in goods, which has been in place since 2009, and the FTA on services and investment which is expected to be signed in the coming months after Asean countries complete their internal processes for signature. This will integrate an economic space of 1.8 billion people and a GDP of over \$3.7 trillion," he said.

The article notes that "India is already pursuing a trilateral highway project with Myanmar and Thailand and another project to link Myanmar with India's landlocked northeast. Other plans include a Delhi-Hanoi railway link running through Manipur and a sea corridor connecting Chennai with Dawei in Myanmar."

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/DEMRRBfzofc0YApHXzahSM/India-seeks-to-boost-connectivity-with-Asean-nations.html>

Date Accessed: 04.02.2014
(Ashwin Varghese)

Current Trend in Labour Migration from India to GCC Countries in response to changes and developments in the Persian Gulf

(Chitra.N, *World Focus*, January 2014)

Over the years labour market conditions in the (Gulf Cooperation Council) GCC countries have deteriorated. Migration costs have increased, while wage rates and working and living conditions have fallen sharply. Migrant workers, many of whom are fully aware of the risks involved, are willing to pay a stiff premium to work in the GCC countries. They not only pay sizeable sums of money to often unscrupulous recruitment agencies but accept less-than-ideal work and living conditions once at the destination. The pattern and trends of labour migration to GCC keeps changing depending up on the changes and developments taking place in the GCC as well as in India. But the author argues that during the distress condition, the Indians in GCC countries should be given proper assistance by the Indian Missions with the help of labour attaché in each country. The major sending state government should be equipped with reabsorbing and rehabilitating the return migrants and streamline them in to the local labour market or support with self employment schemes. Migration policy of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs should include the issues of labours belonging to ECR category.

http://www.cnfworldfocus.org/index_files/409.htm

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014
(Neha Singh)

AFRICA

UN and partners launch 3-year humanitarian plan to help Africa's Sahel region

(FAO, February 03, 2014)

The United Nations and humanitarian partners launched a three-year Regional Strategic Response Plan to provide aid to millions of people in nine countries in Africa's Sahel region. The plan seeks to mobilize an initial US\$2 billion from international donors in 2014. Over twenty million people are currently at risk of food insecurity in the Sahel and 2.5 million of them need urgent lifesaving food assistance. "An estimated 5 million children under five years of age will suffer from malnutrition in 2014, and some 1.5 million of them will face acute malnutrition. Violence and insecurity has forced 1.2 million people to flee their homes creating protracted internal displacement and a refugee crisis."

The strategy comprises country plans for Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. It emphasizes strong partnerships with Governments and development partners, a regional perspective and multi-year time frame to better address the chronic causes of the crises. "The European Commission will give €142 million in humanitarian aid in 2014. More contributions from international donors are needed as soon as possible to meet the basic needs of the people in the Sahel."

<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/213272/icode>

Date Accessed: 04.02.2014

(Amrutha Jose)

The rising rate of suicides of Bhutanese Refugees in the U.S.

(T.P. Mishra, *India Real Time*, January 7, 2014)

A report by the "Center for Disease Control and Prevention", stated that the rate of suicides among Bhutanese refugees resettled in America was 20.3 per 100,000 people over a span of three years, covering a period of 2009 to 2012. This rate exceeded the global suicide rate of 16.0 per 1, 00,000, according to figures from the World Health Organization. Intervention and support from the U.S. government is the need of the hour to address the problem.

Thousands of Bhutanese were displaced as a result of ethnic cleansing policy adopted by Bhutan's government under 'one nation-one people' policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there were around 71,000 Bhutanese refugees living in the U.S. as of October 2013. Additionally, around 26,000 still live in refugee camps in Nepal. Over 13,000 are waiting to migrate from the camps to Western countries through the ongoing resettlement program.

The report links the psychological pressures that are involved in the resettlement process to the high rate of suicides amongst refugees. "Once refugees are relocated, factors such as inability to find work, increased family conflict and symptoms of anxiety, depression and psychological distress" surface.

Parangkush Subedi, a community volunteer in Philadelphia, highlights that there is little discussion about the "staggeringly high rate of suicides among this population".

<http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2014/01/07/american-dream-becomes-nightmare-for-bhutanese-refugees/>

Date Accessed: 03.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

OPINIONS

RBI needs to switch away from Inflation targeting Monetary Policy

(TK Arun, *The Times of India*, February 5, 2014)

The author is of the opinion that India's persistent inflation is the product of desirable structural change and people moving out of farming into construction and other such activities. Between 2001 and 2011, the share of the workforce engaged in farming shrank by 10 percentage points. This has raised wages both in farming and outside it. Tighter credit norms alone without proactive growth cannot tackle inflation.

With reference to Urjit Patel committee report, the author strongly condemns the current monetary policy which according to him is incapable of controlling inflation and was of the opinion that reports basic premise is deeply flawed. The monetary policy should not be targeting inflation and instead we should have a multidimensional approach to target inflation. Another notable point that he made was institutionalising greater flexibility in the prevailing monetary policy frameworks rather than an explicit regime overhaul.

Inflation-targeting approach died in the wake of the financial crisis. The price stability should remain a major concern of all central banks. But overall financial stability including the results of large capital flows, exchange rate movements and asset price changes must also receive equal consideration.

"The central banks of the US, the UK and Japan all target both growth and stability of the financial sector, besides inflation. India needs to go this way, not repress a price index 57% of which is food and fuels, whose prices are scarcely amenable to policy rate tweaks."

Author raises another critical issue that in the wake of the financial crisis, now central banks work in tandem with governments to create macroeconomic stability and growth. But Urjit Patel wants an autonomous committee within an autonomous RBI to formulate monetary policy solely to curb inflation.

"Financial stability is a key determinant of macroeconomic stability. Regulation must ensure financial stability. And for regulation to be effective, it must be integrated and holistic

<http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/cursor/entry/junk-the-urjit-patel-report>

Date Accessed: 05.02.2014

Neha Singh)

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