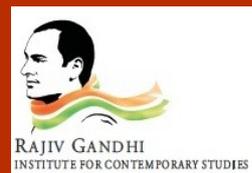


Issue
2.28

RGICS POLICY WATCH



VOL. II ISSUE - 28

24 FEBRUARY 2014

NEW FROM RGICS Upcoming Seminars

Cutting Edge Series:
New Economic Think-
ing

Research project

- Case Studies on Public Policy Decision Making
- Region and Regionalism in India: Issues and Consequences
- Left Wing Extremism
- Consequences of declining Sex Ratio

Other Products

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

INSIDE THE ISSUE

- Parliament can take certain steps to reduce disruptions
- India was the 4th most dangerous country for journalists in 2013

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.

India fares low in Media Freedom Index



Source : <http://careers.theguardian.com/a-survival-guide-for-budding-journalists>



Source: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/print/2013/10/24/Syrian-Afghan-female-journalists-receive-media-awards.html>

Compiled by RGICS
Jawahar Bhawan, New Delhi
Issue Coordinator : Ms. Divashri Mathur

For private circulation and use only for RGICS's educational and training purposes.
Not for sale.

COVER STORY:

- **India fares low in Media Freedom Index**

HEADLINES :

- Parliament can take certain steps to reduce disruptions
- India was the 4th most dangerous country for journalists in 2013

SECTION 1: THE ECONOMY

- India must revive large-scale manufacturing sector
- Jobs Growth in Poor Countries by Income Group
- Tax-free Budget tabled in Tripura Assembly

SECTION 2: GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

- **Politics and Governance:** Parties now have to explain rationale of promises of freebies;
- **Development:** Power System Development Fund (PSDF)
- **Government:** Allocation for food law increased; India ranked 8th in demand for digital governance; Panel asks Govt. to bring fresh legislation on Micro Finance Bill;
- **Security:** Weapons of Mass Reduction;
- **Health:** States with good health indicators show a rise in AEFI cases; Parliament that passes the bill that eases rules on narcotics used in palliative care
- **Transportation:** World Bank to provide \$ 175 m for Gujarat highways project;
- **Technology:** Govt. launches Vikaspedia as online information guide; Water-jet printing pioneered by Chinese chemists;
- **Agriculture:** Agricultural Credit Likely to touch Rs. 7,35,000 Crore

SECTION 3: SOCIETY

- **Education:** Instruction based on learning of child more important than syllabus
- **Gender:** India's First Gun for Women: Solution or problem?; IPU urges rejection of Afghan law protecting abusers of women; Why India Needs Sexual Literacy;
- **Regional:** Rise in Rhino-killings alarms Assam; Rural home plan stalled in West Bengal; Odisha Lokayukta Bill passed in Assembly; World Bank aids dairy sector in Assam; Tamil Nadu to spend Rs. 13,000 cr to improve infrastructure; Maharashtra to introduce new toll policy soon; SC asks Karnataka Chief Secretary to take steps to stop 'devadasi' system; Kerala to ease curbs on sand, rock mining; NE States urge Centre to revise norms for SDRF

SECTION 4: INDIA AND THE WORLD

- **India in the World:** India's national policy on Agroforestry to act as a global model; Australia, India to push for IMF quota reforms at G20
- **East and South East Asia:** UN-mandated human rights inquiry on DPR Korea documents 'widespread, systematic abuses'
- **Africa:** Over 850,000 Somalis desperately need food: UN study; Slow Food youth gardens in Africa promote nutrition and sustainability: FAO
- **Americas:** A shift from "Prohibition" approach to a "Medical Support Program" for drug addicts in the U.S. India, Argentina to strengthen ties in renewable energy

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.

Produced by a dedicated and talented team of scholars at RGICS, led by our young RG-RALs, Policy Watch is a unique product that presents information and analysis about policy for a political audience. Policy Watch has by now covered over a thousand policy issues.

Team RGICS

India fares low in Media Freedom Index

'Reporters without Border' was founded in 1985 by four French journalists. It was then registered as a non-profit organisation in 1995. The core areas that the organisation focuses on is on Internet Censorship and the New Media and to providing material, financial and psychological assistance to journalists assigned to dangerous areas. Every year the organisation also publishes the Media Freedom Index which analysis and categorises the role and functioning of the media across the world. The freedom of media to report is dependent on many factors- the type of political regime, political stability, policies of the government are some of them. The article here discusses the 2013 Media Freedom Index report published

by the above mentioned organisation and in that context the Indian scenario.

"The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders does not take direct account of the kind of political system but it is clear that democracies provide better protection for the freedom to produce and circulate accurate news and information than countries where human rights are flouted," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Christophe Deloire said.

"In dictatorships, news providers and their families are exposed to ruthless reprisals, while in democracies news providers have to cope with the media's economic crises and conflicts of interest. While their situation is not always comparable, we should pay tribute to all those who resist pressure whether it is aggressively focused or diffuse."

The organisation states that, post the experience of the Arab spring one cannot rank the countries merely on the basis of political developments. The 2013 index reflects the of the attitudes and intentions of governments towards media freedom in the medium or long term. It is noteworthy that certain positions in the index have remained unchanged over the past three years. This includes the top three and the bottom three positions. The top three slots are occupied by the European countries of Finland, Norway and Netherlands and the bottom three by Turkmenistan, North Korea and Eritrea. Although many criteria are considered, ranging from legislation to violence against journalists, democratic countries occupy the top of the index while dictatorial countries occupy the last three positions.

The Asian scenario sees Japan falling down in the freedom index by almost 31 positions and this has been largely due to lack of transparency and access to information on subjects directly or indirectly related to Fukushima. "**Malaysia** (145th, -23) has fallen to its lowest-ever position because access to information is becoming more and more limited. The same situation prevails in **Cambodia** (143rd, -26), where authoritarianism and censorship are on the increase. **Macedonia** (116th, -22) has also fallen more than 20 places following the arbitrary withdrawal of media licences and deterioration in the environment for journalists. **India** (140th, -9) is at its lowest since 2002 because of increasing impunity for violence against journalists and because Internet censorship continues to grow. **China** (173rd, +1) shows no sign of improving. Its prisons still hold many journalists and netizens, while increasingly unpopular Internet censorship continues to be a major obstacle to access to information."(<http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013,1054.html>)

The freedom of media is impacted by movements, political instability and regional remodelling. For example the 2012 index was influenced by the Arab spring and all those covering the protests were targeted by the government.

Similar reactions were seen in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. where regime change has taken place, countries such as Syria and **Bahrain** where uprisings and the resulting repression are still ongoing, and countries such as **Morocco, Algeria, Oman, Jordan** and **Saudi Arabia**, where the authorities have used promises and compromise to defuse calls for political and/or social and economic change. Some of the new governments which arose due to these protest movements have turned on the journalists and netizens who covered these movements' demands and aspirations for more freedom. Political instability too makes it difficult for the media to report independently and the journalists are often exposed to threats, physical assaults and shut downs.

So in the light of this background, in the following section, we will analyse the situation in India on the basis of the parameters used for media specialists for analysis.

1) Legislation relating to media and Censorship

In terms of legislation, The Press (Objectionable Matters) Act, 1951, Defence of India Act, 1962, Civil Defence Act, 1968, Contempt of Courts Act, 1971 and The Official Secrets Act 1923 deal with the restriction of content that can or cannot be published by various media outlets.

The Information Technology Act (2008) was a result of the increasing challenge of data protection and making online transaction secure in the wake of data theft and online fraud. This has certainly increased online surveillance and has, in turn, lead to unfounded and debatable censorship of content. So is the case with other laws that have been mentioned above which have been used to suppress critical content under the pretext of being libellous, slanderous and defamatory.

For example, a number of reports criticising IIPM-a popular management institute- were effectively removed on the grounds of defamatory content. What comes across from this example is that any truthful and factual article can run the risk of being branded defamatory by interested groups.

What is Defamation?

Defamation is any kind of imputation either through spoken words or visual representation including published articles or paintings, cartoons, etc. that is harmful to the reputation of a person or groups of persons and organisations.

However, legally cases dealing with defamation there are exceptions wherein the charge of defamation can be countered if:

1. There has been a fair criticism of the conduct of a public official. For defamation to be proven before the court of law claims have to be substantiated with evidence of prior knowledge of the allegation being false or reckless attitude regarding its veracity on the part of the person accused of defamation.
2. It deals with issues of public importance and persons in the public eye. In case facts and criticism are interwoven, the veracity of facts stated is examined first and then decision is taken with regard to the fairness of the criticism.
3. If while reporting a judicial or court case, the comments and facts are in accordance with the proceedings of the court and the merits of the case.
4. If the criticism of a work of art available or displayed in the public domain is as per the merits of the work and in good faith.

Other than defamatory charges, media outlets can be sued for charges of sedition (124A), content promoting differences on the basis of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc. under Section 153A and 153B, provoking communal discontent under Section 295A, obscenity under Section 292 and 293 and disclosure of identity of victims of certain offences under Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

2) Accountability and regulation

In terms of media's accountability, the Press Council of India deals with the cases reported against the journalistic malpractices. However, its ambit is restricted to dealing with print media and is yet to include electronic and social media. Secondly, The PCI itself is not empowered enough to take disciplinary actions against defaulters.

However, according to an article-*How effective is the Press Council?*- the number of cases against the press outnumbered those committed by the press in 2012. While there were 67 reported cases against the press only 23 cases were from the press on harassment (12) and interference with freedom of press (10). This means that media in India that has been championing the cause of freedom of speech and expression is also not free of malpractices and misuse of power.

3) Accessibility of information

As far as India is concerned, the report notes the anti-media environment has been created by a number of factors. These include internet censorship, limited access to conflict areas such as Kashmir and Chattisgarh and violence against media persons.

However, an article published at the Hoot highlighted the challenge of reporting in conflict zones since media persons are subjected to pressures from State authorities as well as rebel groups and organisations. While rebel groups want reports to highlight their cause and activities, the State authorities pressurise the media houses to publish reports to create good will amidst readers for their efforts.

4) Violence against media persons

According to a study- *Killing the Messenger*- published by the International News Safety Institute (INSI), India is the fourth most dangerous place for journalists with the death toll of journalists being 13 for the last year. These killings were while reporters were working on their respective assignments.

5) Control over content in the wake of Cross media ownership

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), in its recommendations to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting in 2009, pointed out the need to maintain media plurality and diversity across print, television, radio and online media by effectively controlling cross media ownership.

According to TRAI's findings corporatisation of media has led to the emergence of large media conglomerates where single entities/groups have strong presence across different media segments.

Table 1.3 below depicts the presence of certain business houses across the different media segments and in their distribution platforms.

Group of Companies	Broadcasting			Distribution Platform	
	Print	TV Channels	FM Radio Station	DTH	MSO
Sun TV	√	√	√	√	√
Essel Group	√	√	√	√	√
Star India		√	√	√	√
Ushodaya (Eenadu)	√	√	√		
India Today	√	√	√		
The Times Group	√	√	√		
HT Media	√		√		
ABP Group	√	√	√		
Bhaskar Group	√	√	√		
Jagran Prakashan	√	√	√		
Sakkal Media	√	√			
Malayala	√	√	√		
Manorama Group					
D.B. Corporation Group	√		√		
Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group	√	√	√	√	
Asianet Communications		√	√		

Table 1.3 Presence of business houses across various segments of media¹⁵

Source:

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) consultation paper on issues relating to media ownership published on February 15, 2013.

6) Print Journalism turning too costly for producers

The challenge of covering up cost of production and earning profits needs to be considered as well since this ultimately has an impact on journalistic practices and the content being produced and circulated. To make up for these low cover prices, the newspapers in India are majorly dependent on ad revenues. Around 70% of the net revenue comes from ads while the rest is through circulation. Even The Times of India, which is the most widely read English newspaper in India with a readership of 13.4 million as per 2010 Indian Readership Survey (IRS), sells for the equivalent of less than 10 US cents a copy. Out of the total Rs. 327 billion spent on media advertising in India, print media has a share of 46 per cent which amounts to Rs. 150 billion.

Conclusion

Considering that cases of excesses are found on both sides- media persons as well as the subject that includes the public and State authorities- there is an urgent need to come up with an inclusive policy to address the issue of censorship. The challenge is to strike a balance by maintaining media freedom along with checking media excesses.

Media freedom cannot be attained solely through concentrating all authority of publishing and circulation in the hands of the producers. It has to include accountability mechanisms involving:

- suppliers of information- media organisations,
- other stakeholders in the organisation- funding sources of the organisations, and
- interested or affected groups including subjects of news reports.

References:

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=53617>

<http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1041742/>

<http://www.thehoot.org/web/home/cyber2.php?cid=51&sid=6268>

<http://thehoot.org/web/home/story.php?storyid=6292&mod=1&pg=1§ionId=9&valid=true>

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

<http://www.firstpost.com/india/india-was-4th-most-dangerous-country-for-journalists-in-2013-1398201.html>

http://www.traai.gov.in/WriteReadData/ConsultationPaper/Document/CP_on_Cross_media_%2015-02-2013.pdf

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/436ce7f4-027d-11e3-880d-00144feab7de.html#axzz2tw37FWY9>

Parliament can take certain steps to reduce disruptions

(M.R. Madhavan, *The Hindu*, February 14, 2014)

The article lays down some important measures that can be undertaken to ensure effective functioning of the Indian Parliament. It makes the point that systems that ensure parliamentary accountability are a prerequisite to reduce disruptions in the Parliament.

The Indian Parliament decides its daily agenda through weekly meeting of an all-party Business Advisory Committee based on a consensus. This means that every party has a veto on any topic suggested for inclusion in the list of business. However, this leaves the scope for the government in power to block any topic. Hence, the government can control what topics may be taken up for discussion. It can move the agenda of the Parliament in its favour and thus, the opposition has no other choice but to resort to disruption. The current Lok Sabha saw 38% of the scheduled time lost to disruptions (13% in the previous Lok Sabha). Over 40% of the Question Hour was lost, which implies lower accountability of the government to Parliament.

The system which guides the functioning of the Indian Parliament, if amended, can ensure effective performance. For this, the following steps can be taken:

- 1. Any motion or discussion has to be taken up if a certain number of MPs gives a written notice:** The no-confidence motion requires just 50 MPs to be admitted. There could be a new rule for discussion if a certain percentage of the strength of the House (say 20%) asks for it, and a voting motion if a certain percentage of MPs (say 30%) gives a written notice.
- 2. To guarantee some time for the opposition:** The British Parliament allocates 20 days a year when the agenda is decided by the opposition. It also requires Parliament to meet more frequently. In the 1950s, the Indian Parliament met for 120-140 days every year; now the number ranges between 60 and 70 days.
- 3. Deciding the schedule of the Parliament:** It can be fixed in two ways. First, a calendar of sittings should be announced at the beginning of each year for limited flexibility. Second, the rules should be amended to ensure that House is summoned if a significant minority (say 25% or 33%) of members gives a written notice.

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-02-14/news/47336511_1_joint-parliamentary-committee-disruptions-accountability

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

India was the 4th most dangerous country for journalists in 2013

(*First Post*, February 19, 2014)

A report released by London-based International News Safety Institute (INSI) estimated that one hundred and thirty-four journalists and media support staff were killed while on reporting assignments last year, with India fourth on the list of countries with the most number of deaths and most of those killed were targeted deliberately.

The main reasons for the deaths includes:-

- Covering armed conflicts in regions like Syria, Iraq
- Peacetime coverage of issues like crime and corruption
- Deaths due to accidents

“Syria and Iraq were cited by the Institute as the most dangerous countries for journalists last year. Philippines with 14 deaths, India with 13 and Pakistan with 9 were also added to the list. The total incidents came down from 152 deaths recorded in 2012, but there was an accompanying rise in assaults, threats and kidnappings directed at journal-

ists which largely go unreported according to INSI report.” The institute is funded by major world news organisations including Reuters has been issuing the report since 1996. Its main work is providing security training for journalists reporting in dangerous situations.

The 2013 total for the Philippines, which in past years has seen a mass shooting of reporters as well as individual assassinations, included five who lost their lives in natural disasters.

<http://www.firstpost.com/india/india-was-4th-most-dangerous-country-for-journalists-in-2013-1398201.html>

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014

(Neha Singh)

India must revive large-scale manufacturing sector

(James Crabtree, *The Fiscal Times*, February 18, 2014)

The article highlights the importance of large-scale manufacturing sector in India for employment generation and higher growth. **India's vast and inexpensive workforce calls for major structural changes for manufacturing sector constituting of electronics, garmenting and food processing.** The trend of "specialist manufacturing sector", targeting a niche market, has been increasing in India. The 240 million strong workforce to be achieved in India by 2030 creates the need of "large scale manufacturing sector" which can absorb the mushrooming working population.

India's manufacturing has contributed at a stable and low proportion of about 15 per cent of national output. Recently, the Indian government announced minor duty reductions for the automotive and capital goods sectors. A McKinsey research highlights that "only 11 per cent of those who work in Indian manufacturing are in businesses with 200 or more employees." This record is poor when compared to other South Asian countries, like Indonesia and China.

Lack of institutional capacity, red-tapism and difficulties in land acquisition has added to the poor performance of the manufacturing sector. Recently, the Indian government also announced minor duty reductions for the automotive and capital goods sectors. Report suggests measures like reforming land and labour laws to reducing arcane inspections and rationalising the tax system.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/5529d53a-9862-11e3-a32f-00144feab7de.html>

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

Jobs Growth in Poor Countries by Income Group

(*The Economist*, 21 January 2013)

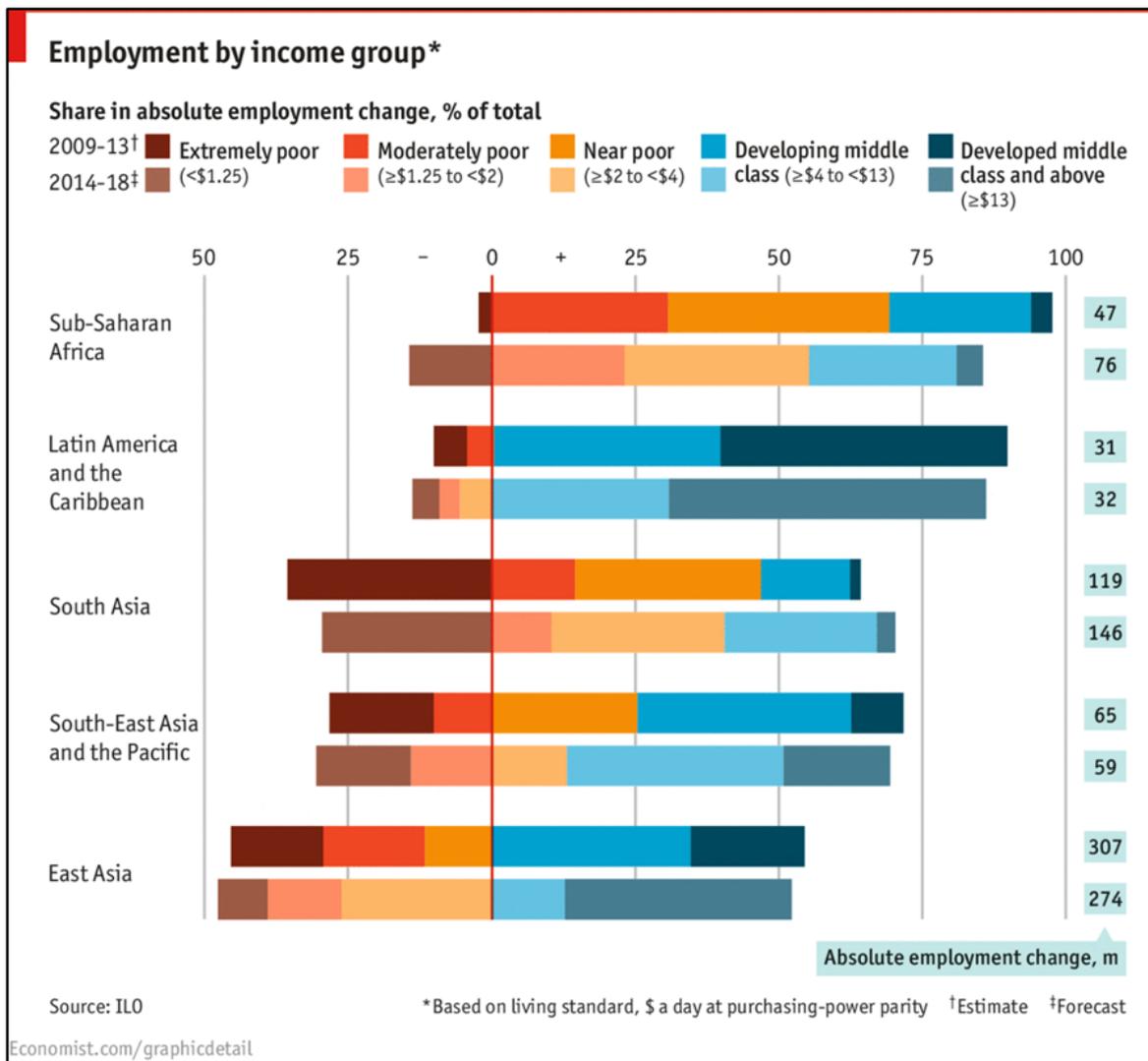
The past five years has seen booming employment in poor countries. The next five years will see a big spurt of new jobs as well, raising the fortunes of the poorest and solidifying the financial status of the emerging middle class.

A new report by the International Labour Organisation shows a decline in the share of extremely poor workers (living on less than \$1.25 a day) and an increase in workers among the middle class—with significant regional differences. In the chart, left of zero mean fewer jobs in those income groups, while right of zero mean more jobs. So in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the share of jobs for the poorest workers will contract while jobs for people with more income will expand. Overall, the data tell an optimistic story: not only are jobs increasing, but the middle class is as well.

The current slowdown in India has been propelled by poor performance in the manufacturing sector and low levels of investment. This has made it harder to sustain the growth which enables expansion of job creation in the formal economy.

Total employment in India expanded from 2009/10 to 2011/12 by 13.9 million though many of these jobs are in the informal sector where jobs are generally poorly paid and unprotected.

The current slowdown and domestic challenges facing economies in South Asia imply that the goal of creating decent work will continue to be difficult in 2014 and the near future. Efforts to ensure that growth translates into more decent employment, especially for the young men and women entering the labour market must be enhanced in the coming years.



<http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2014/01/daily-chart-11>

Date Accessed: 15.02.2014

(Gayatri Verma)

Tax-free Budget tabled in Tripura Assembly

(*The Shilling Times*, February 20th, 2014)

Tripura Finance Minister Badal Chowdhury tabled a tax-free Budget of Rs. 12404.77 crore for 2014-15 FY leaving a budgetary deficit of Rs. 158.66 crore. “The Budget deficit will be squared up by compressing non-development expenditure, stepping up of resource mobilization, better tax enforcement and through austerity measures. The estimated Budget is 28.65 percent higher than that of last year- 2013-14.”

“Laying the Budget, the Finance Minister said the Union government has resorted to stopping new recruitment, abolition of vacant posts and reduction of the employment opportunity in the government sector.” He further added that the “The policy of the Left Front government is quite different. The state government has been striving it’s best to expand the employment opportunities in the government sector. The recruitment of 4606 UGTs was the reflection of the government’s stand on employment”.

The Budget speech also highlighted government's plans to push infrastructure building in the state and provide by-cycle to girls from economically poor family whose family income is below Rs. 1.25 lakh yearly and studying from Class IX to XII.

The opposition Congress, however, termed the Budget as "aimless and purposeless for the common people" and "far behind what the people expect from the Left Front government".

<http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2014/02/20/tax-free-budget-tabled-in-tripura-assembly/>

Date Accessed: 21.02.2014

(Junty Sharma Pathak)

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Parties now have to explain rationale of promises of freebies

(Business Standard, February 23, 2014)

“Political parties can no longer make tall promises on freebies in their election manifestos as they will now have to explain the rationale of their pledges and ways and means of meeting the financial requirements.

This follows an Election Commission move to create a level-playing field before elections following directions from the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court had noted in its July 5, 2013 verdict that though promises in election manifesto cannot be construed as a corrupt practice as per law, the distribution of freebies of any kind "influences" all people.

While issuing the guidelines after incorporating views of political parties during their meeting with them on February 7, the poll body included them in the Model Code of Conduct.

The poll body said the manifesto shall not contain anything repugnant to the ideals and principles enshrined in the Constitution and that it shall be consistent with the letter and spirit of other provisions of the Model Code.

EC said Directive Principles of state policy enshrined in Constitution enjoin upon the state to frame various welfare measures for citizens and therefore there can be no objection to the promise of such welfare measures in manifestos.

Parties, during their meeting with EC, had expressed divergent views and most of them were against issue of such guidelines saying making promises to the electorate was their right.”

http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/parties-now-have-to-explain-rationale-of-promises-of-freebies-114022300210_1.html

Date Accessed: 24.02.2014

(Karishma Mutreja)

DEVELOPMENT

Power System Development Fund (PSDF)

(PIB, February 19, 2014)

The Government has approved the scheme for operationisation of Power System Development Fund (PSDF) in January, 2014. As on 31.12.2013, about Rs.6300 crore was available with this Fund.

The criteria and purpose for which the PSDF will be utilized are as follows:

1. Creating necessary transmission systems of strategic importance based on operational feedback by Load Dispatch
2. Centers for relieving congestion in Inter-State Transmission Systems (ISTS) and Intra-State System which are incidental to the ISTS.
3. Installation of shunt capacitors, series compensators and other reactive energy generators for improvement of voltage profile in the grid.
4. Installation of standard and special protection schemes, pilot and demonstrative projects, and for setting right the discrepancies identified in protection audits on regional basis.
5. Renovation and Modernization (R&M) of transmission and distribution systems for relieving congestion.
6. Any other scheme / project in furtherance of the above objectives, such as, conducting technical studies and capacity building etc.

Projects proposed by distribution utilities in the above areas that have a bearing on grid safety and security, provided these are not covered under any other scheme of the Government of India will be eligible under this scheme. Private

Sector projects will not be eligible for assistance from the Fund.

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=103924>

Date Accessed: 19.02.2014

(Neha Singh)

GOVERNMENT

Allocation for food law increased

(Business Standard, February 18, 2014)

The government has allocated Rs 88,500 crore towards this in the 2014-15 interim Budget, compared with Rs 10,000 crore in the 2013-14 Budget, hoping to roll out its ambitious national food security scheme across all states soon.

Overall, food subsidy was pegged at Rs 115,000 crore. Of this, Rs 88,500 is for the food security law, while the rest will largely be used to meet the carry-over subsidy expenditure from 2013-14.

"Rs 1,15,000 crore has been allocated for food subsidy, keeping in mind our government's firm and irrevocable commitment to implement the National Food Security Act throughout the country," Finance Minister P Chidambaram said in his 2014-15 interim Budget speech.

About 10 states and Union territories have been allocated food-grain under the National Food Security Act, as these have started implementing the law by identifying the beneficiaries, as per the government's estimates.

Karnataka and Chhattisgarh started this in January 2014, while Uttarakhand, Maharashtra and Chandigarh began work towards this in February.

In September 2013, Haryana was the first state to have started implementing the scheme. In October 2013, Rajasthan, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh followed. Punjab started in December.

In September 2013, Parliament passed the food security Bill, to give 67% of the population the right to subsidised food-grain. Under the scheme, every eligible person would get rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg and coarse cereals at Rs 1/kg, through state governments, under the Public Distribution Scheme.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/allocation-for-food-law-increased-114021701831_1.html

Date Accessed: 18.2.2014

(Shruti Issar)

India ranked 8th in demand for digital governance

(Jagran Josh, February 12, 2014)

As per a report on digital governance prepared by Accenture, India is ranked 8th in list of ten countries in terms of digital governance. The list was topped by Singapore followed by Norway and UAE at second and third place respectively.

The report reveals the demand for the digital governance is rising in India and emerging economies which will enhance efficiency and output. In India the Government embarked on e- Governance model and the infrastructure which would pay the dividends in the long run.

According to the report, high-performing digital governments are:

- Focusing on their digital strategy, which is deeply, embedded in the government agenda and public reforms.
- Continuing long-term investment in key information and communication technology (ICT) assets and the

- digitalization of core public services, such as taxation, pensions and healthcare.
- Leveraging the power of new technologies, such as social media, mobility, analytics, big data and cloud computing.
 - Connected across agency boundaries and have a strong culture of collaboration and data sharing.

One of the criteria used by the report for measuring digital governance was the extent to which government agencies are citizen-centric, leveraging multichannel and cross-government public service delivery and initiating proactive communications, education and the use of social media for engagement.

<http://www.jagranjosh.com/current-affairs/india-ranked-8th-in-demand-for-digital-governance-1392207089-1>

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Panel asks Govt. to bring fresh legislation on Micro Finance Bill

(The Hindu Business Line, February 17, 2014)

A bill on micro-finance institutions (MFIs) which sought to empower the Reserve Bank to regulate them and fix interest rates ceiling on loans to be provided by MFIs was rejected by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance headed by senior BJP leader and former finance minister Yashwant Sinha and asked to bring a fresh Legislation. The bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in May, 2012 and was later referred to the committee for perusal.

View of the state government, and regulators namely, RBI, PFRDA, IRDA and financial institutions like NABARD on the other, the committee finds that the bill lacks adequate groundwork and consensus, requiring wider consultations with stakeholders and deeper study on vital issues.

The panel has also suggested to constitution of a unified and independent regulator for the entire micro finance sector as a whole, which may be termed as the Micro Finance and Development Regulatory council (MFDRC) with representatives from all agencies and institutions concerned like RBI, NABARD and SIDBI and the nominees from central government and MFIs.

The bill, which was drafted against the backdrop of problems faced by borrowers of MFIs in Andhra Pradesh and other states, provides for compulsory registration of MFIs with the RBI. The micro finance business, which entails doling out small loans at high interest rates to those who do not have access conventional lending institutions, has come under intense regulatory scrutiny in the wake of an Act passed by the Andhra Pradesh government.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/panel-asks-govt-to-bring-fresh-legislation-on-micro-finance-bill/article5699324.ece>

Date Accessed: 19.02.2014

(Neha Singh)

SECURITY

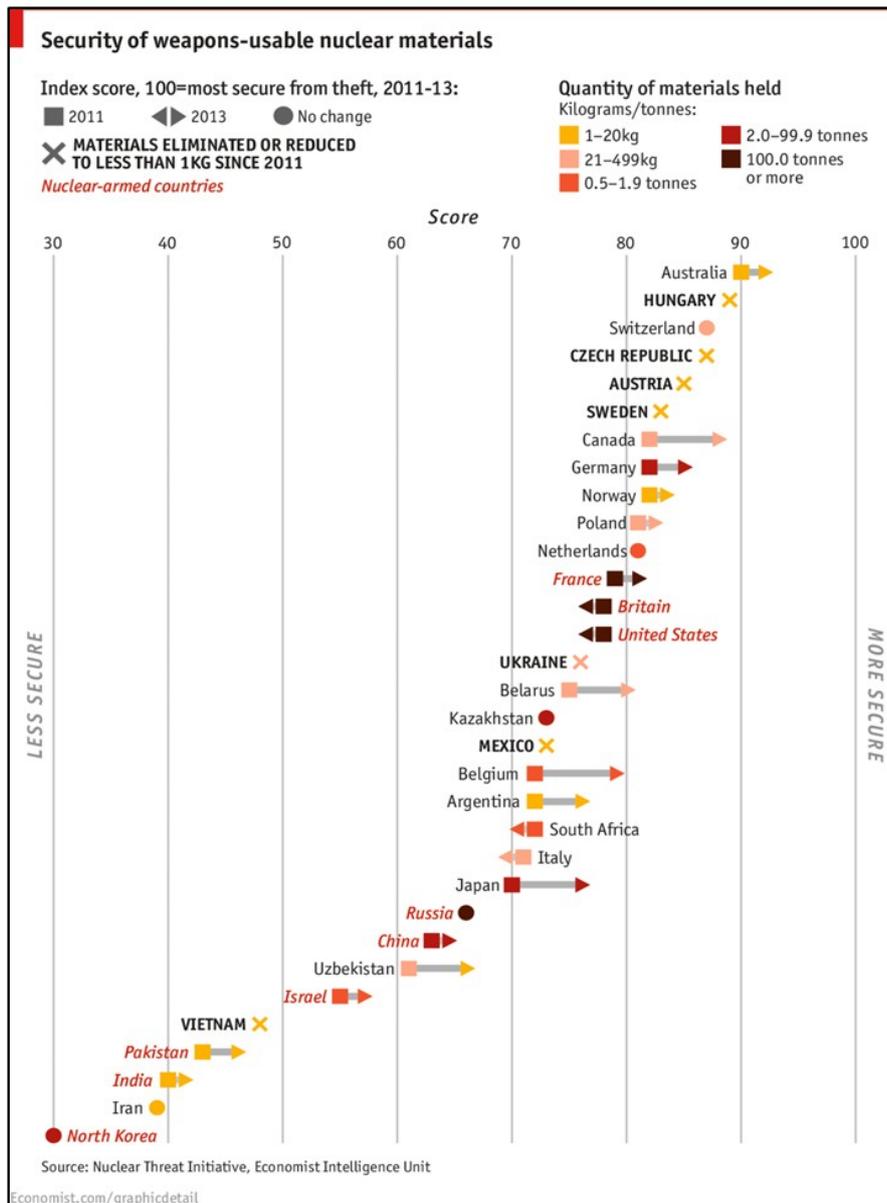
Weapons of Mass Reduction

(J.S. & P.K., The Economist, 14 January, 2014)

The world is slightly safer. Over the past two years, seven countries have reduced their stockpiles of weapons-usable nuclear materials to less than 1kg, which is insufficient to make a bomb. However nuclear-arms materials remain vulnerable to the danger of theft. Around 2,000 tonnes of highly enriched uranium, separated plutonium and mixed oxide fuel are stored in hundreds of sites scattered around the world. Many sites are poorly guarded by civilian contractors—and thus offer tempting pickings for terrorists.

A new report from the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), a Washington-based organisation, and the Economist Intelligence Unit, shows the progress and problems. In an index of countries with at least 1kg of weapons-usable materials, over half of the 25 countries have improved security since the inaugural index two years ago, in particular Japan, Canada and Belgium. Of course the best form of security is to have nothing to steal: Ukraine and Mexico have eliminated their stockpiles.

According to the NTI report, India scores near the bottom of the NTI Index due to our continued increase in quantities of nuclear material, and high levels of corruption among public officials. India's nuclear materials security conditions could be improved by strengthening its laws and regulations for security and control of materials, particularly for control and accounting of materials, mitigating the insider threat, and for the physical security of materials during transport.



<http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2014/01/daily-chart-8>

Date Accessed: 15.02.2014

(Gayatri Verma)

HEALTH

States with good health indicators show a rise in AEFI cases

(Down To Earth, February 17, 2014)

In the wake of fresh debates regarding the rise in the reported adverse events following immunisation (AEFI) cases all over the country, states with better health indicators seem to have higher death rates amidst children who have been immunised with the five-in-one pentavalent vaccines.

According to the findings of the magazine, states like Goa and Kerala with low Infant Mortality Rates- 10 and 12 respectively- have emerged to be regions where deaths due to pentavalent vaccines are high. This was revealed in an RTI response given by the Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) on December 13, 2013.

The rise in AEFI deaths has been witnessed in regions where pentavalent vaccine has been introduced in a phased manner including Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa, Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, Gujarat, Karnataka and Puducherry.

According to some doctors, pentavalent vaccine is causing more harm than good because the disease it is meant to fight is not so prevalent. However, the government clarified that the rise in deaths need not be associated with pentavalent immunisation drives since the number of deaths were highest after the first dose, but kept decreasing as second and third doses were administered.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/are-some-states-under-reporting-pentavalent-vaccine-deaths>

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Parliament passes bill that eases rules on narcotics used in palliative care

(Kundan Pandey, Down to Earth, February 21, 2014)

The Rajya Sabha passed the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Bill on 21st February. The legislation will bring much-needed relief to terminally ill patients who need palliative care. The bill amends the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985, which provides for confiscation of illegally traded narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

The legislation came as a response to a long standing demand by the cancer experts to ease regulations on narcotic drugs that are recommended for alleviating excruciating pain in cancer patients, especially those who are terminally ill.

“The National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, a document approved by the Union Cabinet on January 12, 2012, states that tens of thousands of patients in India suffer from avoidable pain because of the strict regulations. The document says that India is home to one-sixth of world’s population, but it consumes only one-thousandth of the total morphine used in the world.”

The passage of the bill is expected to drastically change pain management in India and turn out to be a big development for cancer patients.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/parliament-passes-bill-eases-rules-narcotics-palliative-care>

Date Accessed: 25.02.2014

(Simi Sunny)

TRANSPORT

World Bank to provide \$ 175 m for Gujarat highways project

(*Exim News Service, February 16, 2014*)

For the second Gujarat Stage Highways Project, India has signed a \$ 175-million loan agreement with the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), as per the officials.

The Department of Roads and Buildings, government of Gujarat is the implementing agency for the loan and the implementation period of the loan is five years.

The loan is targeted towards improving the condition, capacity and safety of about 625 km of the 6,444 km core state road network.

The roads being identified for the improvement passes through 16 districts, with a population of around 38 million. The project comprises of three components—

- The Highway Improvement Component costing \$ 290 million
- Sector Policy and Institutional Development Component which would cost \$ 12 million
- The Road Safety Management Component costing \$ 22 million.

<http://www.eximin.net/NewsDetails.aspx?name=74904>

Date Accessed: 18.2.2014

(Shruti Issar)

TECHNOLOGY

Govt. launches Vikaspedia as online information guide

(*PTI, February 18, 2014*)

The Government has announced the launch of an online information guide, Vikaspedia, for social sectors, and software tools to develop Internet-based content in local languages.

The Vikaspedia portal at present has initial information on health, agriculture, education, social welfare, energy and e-governance and will keep adding more information. The portal at present can be accessed in 5 Indian languages and will soon be accessible in all 22 Indian languages.

An official from Department of electronics and information technology (DEITY) stated, "Vikaspedia is part of democratization of information. Earlier, for some information people had to pay but now most of it will be made available for which they don't have to pay."

<http://www.livemint.com/Industry/zQAIYEPdiDq62R2y9G9ZXO/Govt-launches-Vikaspedia-as-online-information-guide.html>

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014

(Deepthi Somani)

Water-jet printing pioneered by Chinese chemists

(*Want China Times*, February 19, 2014)

A team of chemists from China's Jilin University have recently invented a cost saving and eco friendly water-jet printer. **Government offices, where eco- friendly substitutes to paper documentation have been advocated, can especially benefit from the invention as the technology allows one page to be reprinted dozens of times.**

According to the official website of Ecology Global Network, nearly 4 billion trees or 35% of the total trees cut around the world are consumed by the paper industry on every continent. Interestingly, the printer can switch between water and ink. When on water mode, the text fades away within 22 hours of being printed and when on ink mode, the printer generates a permanent record.

<http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?cid=1102&MainCatID=11&id=20140219000114>

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Credit Likely to touch Rs. 7,35,000 Crore

(*Indian Awaz*, 17 February, 2014)

Finance minister recently announced that agricultural credit is likely to touch Rs. 7,35,000 crore in the current year, exceeding the target of Rs. 7,00,000 crore. Finance Minister set a target of Rs. 8,00,000 crore for 2014-15. He also added that in the current year agricultural GDP growth is estimated at 4.6 percent while presenting the Interim Budget for 2014-15.

“He also mentioned about the interest subvention scheme introduced in 2006-07. There is a subvention of 2 percent and an incentive of 3 percent for prompt payment, thus reducing the effective rate of interest on farm loans to 4 percent. So far, Rs. 23,924 crore has been released under the scheme.”

“Foodgrain production in 2012-13 was 255.36 million tonnes and the estimate for the current year is 263 million tonnes. Finance minister further added that the estimates of production of sugarcane, cotton, pulses, oilseeds and quality seeds point to new records and the agriculture exports in 2012-13 stood at USD 41 billion versus imports of USD 20 billion. In 2013-14, agriculture exports are likely to cross USD 45 billion.”

http://theindianawaaz.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16884&catid=20

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014

(Neha Singh)

EDUCATION

Instructions based on learning of child more important than syllabus

(*Hindustan Times*, February 24, 2014)

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2013 has presented a mixed review of the education system in rural districts in India. While Enrolment in India's primary schools is still at an impressive 96%, and the number of schools compliant with the Right to Education (RTE) Act norms, such as providing drinking water and usable toilets, continues to rise, unacceptably low learning levels has emerged as a major challenge.

"Learning levels are unacceptably low and have been stagnant or getting worse over the past few years, especially in government schools. In basic reading and numeracy skills, the majority of our schoolchildren are falling several years behind where they should be based on their ages and the classes they attend. Although we have schools that are open and children that attend, many of these schools are failing in their basic mission of teaching."

Impact evaluations carried out by MIT's Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) along with various state governments and NGOs such as Pratham has revealed that teaching at the right level — classroom instruction based on the actual learning level of the child, rather than what the government-prescribed syllabus for that class may be — is consistently successful in improving student achievement.

A successful model approach has been Pratham's Balsakhi programme where mobilised local youth, often women, to work with children identified by the school as having fallen behind. These 'balsakhis' hold two-hour pull-out classes in the school to teach core skills in literacy and numeracy starting from the current level of the children.

Another interesting approach comes from a pilot programme implemented by the government of Haryana during the 2012-13 academic year which show that significant learning gains can be achieved by applying the teaching at the right level approach through regular government teachers during school hours.

It is time we improve the learning outcome of our education system and design specialized programmes to achieve this goal. Given the validation of teaching at the right level by scientific research in multiple settings, more and more education departments should integrate this system into their programmes.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/comment/homepage-comment/learning-level-of-child-important-than-syllabus-of-class/article1-1187461.aspx>

Date Accessed: 25.02.2014

(Simi Sunny)

GENDER

India's First Gun for Women: Solution or problem?

(Kaavya Asoka, *The Guardian*, 26 January, 2014)

India appears to be following the US by making and marketing guns for women, but it won't make women any safer. "Nirbheek" is small, light and can just about "fit into a lady's purse"; it's also India's first gun for women. Named after the 23-year-old victim of the Delhi gang-rape case in December 2012, the 500 gram light-weight .32 caliber revolver produced by the state-owned India Ordnance Factory is being marketed as the latest solution to the wide-spread problem of sexual violence and rape in the subcontinent. According to a BBC interview with the General Manager of the Indian Ordnance Factory, "Indian women like their ornaments" and so it comes in a maroon jewelry case.

While guns like Nirbheek are undoubtedly designed to appeal to women's "feminine" sensibilities, they're also

selling women an argument about self-defense: that guns are somehow "empowering" and perhaps more damagingly, that women alone are responsible for keeping their aggressors away.

There is enough evidence to suggest that the argument for guns as self-defense, and particularly the defense of women, is not only an invalid but also a dangerous one. Research on gun violence by organizations like the Harvard Injury Control Research Center has shown that more guns always equals more firearm-related homicides and more guns have also been linked to an increase in violent female deaths.

India has the second highest number of privately-owned guns. Arming women cynically conflates the myth of guns as the great equalizer with female self-defense, and tries to capitalize on the frustration, fear and anger that the issue of rape inspires in women across India.

The idea of a gun for women also aims to profit from our desire to grasp at the deceptive image of the armed woman as symbolizing female empowerment. As women's rights advocates in India and elsewhere well know, guns aren't the solution to the deep-rooted sexism and misogyny that fuel violence against women. As Binalakshmi Nepram, founder of the Women Gun Survivors Network, recently put it, the marketing of guns to women as a solution to rape and sexual violence is nothing more than an "admission of failure" of a system that is bound to uphold equality. And buying into the myth only means that the market wins.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/26/india-guns-for-women-follow-us>

Date Accessed: 19.02.2014

(Gayatri Verma)

IPU urges rejection of Afghan law protecting abusers of women

(IPU Press Brief, February 10, 2014)

This article highlights the condemnation of a new law in Afghanistan by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). IPU called on Afghanistan to reject the proposed law that would prevent judicial authorities from questioning the relatives of a criminal defendant in a case involving violence against women and girls, making prosecutions highly difficult. The bill, passed by both houses of the Afghan parliament on 19 January, is awaiting signature by President Hamid Karzai to come into force.

With most violence against women in Afghanistan occurring within the family, the new law would deny effective protection and reparation to victims by silencing those who witness their abuse.

IPU has asked President Karzai to send the law back to parliament until it is revised in line with the Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) of 2009 which ensured criminal punishment for various abuses including domestic violence, rape, forced and child marriage, as well as the sale of women and girls to resolve disputes between families.

"The bill passed by the Afghan parliament is a retrograde step. Endorsing such violence is a fundamental violation of human rights and greatly undermines Afghanistan's move to become a strong democracy," said IPU President Abdelwahad Radi.

IPU urged Afghanistan to meet its obligations under international law as a State party to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

<http://www.ipu.org/press-e/pressnote201402101.htm>

Date Accessed: 16.2.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

Why India Needs Sexual Literacy

(*Huffington Post*, February 12, 2014)

The article advocates mandating sexual education in schools across the country as a necessary first step to make boys and girls more aware about social relations. The need of a reform in India's social structure, which will wipe away taboos that have remained a powerful force in education, policy, and social relations, are the need of the hour.

The article opines that the Indian society is facing contradicting realities- "Westernization with modernization" on one hand and "conservative forces" assuming stronger outlook on the other. This "cultural shock" has explained Indian population's dilemma in dealing with contemporary issues on women identity, roles and safety. Trafficking is another major issue. Many parts of India have high percentage of women being trafficked to cities as sex workers.

There exists a "social infrastructure gap" in the country. The failure of education and social institutions to safeguard women's rights has added to the sorry state of affairs. Most schools in India do not have sex education and other education centres tend to enforce certain gender norms that make it difficult for women to get an open space.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/murali-balaji/why-india-needs-sexual-literacy-4763942.html>

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Mahima Malik)

REGIONAL

Rise in Rhino-killings alarms Assam

(*Times of India*, February 17, 2014)

In the wake of increased hunting and killing of rhinoceroses in Assam, the authorities from the Kaziranga National Park has stepped up operations within and outside the national park to check poaching activity within the premises. Six rhinoceroses have already been killed in Kaziranga alone since January. While one was killed in Manas National Park. According to reports, seven rhinos have been killed in the state within a span of a month-and-a-half.

The director of Kaziranga National Park was hopeful that it with increased anti-poaching operations, defaulters would be punished and their shelters would be cracked. According to wildlife crime experts, increased poaching is a result of an international clandestine network of poachers who are always looking for safer places to hunt down animals.

Save The Rhino (STR)-an international NGO working for conservation of African and Asian rhinos- elaborated that poaching was fuelled by the illegal trade in rhino horn. They attributed the rise in poaching to the growing demand for rhino horn in Asian countries like China and Vietnam where it is believed to have medicinal value.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/environment/flora-fauna/Rhinos-being-killed-with-alarming-frequency-in-Assam/articleshow/30545993.cms>

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Rural home plan stalled in West Bengal

(Naresh Jana, *The Telegraph*, February 17, 2014)

Villagers in West Bengal's Belpahari are unable to construct houses under the central scheme- Indira Awas Yojana- because they are waiting their second installment from the local panchayat.

However, according to block administration officials, the villagers have not yet submitted their certificates of utilisation.

The 110 villagers said that they got the first installment of Rs 24,000 from November 2012 to February 2013. Under the central scheme a person who owns a plot and is below the poverty line is entitled to an amount of Rs. 42000 to build a house. This is to be sanctioned by the local panchayat in two installments. The second installment would be released on the condition that the beneficiaries submit a utilisation certificate along with the photographs of the status of the house.

According to some villagers, houses might not be complete even if the remaining sum is released by the authorities because of price inflation of raw materials required for construction.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140217/jsp/siliguri/story_17946321.jsp#.UwMupvmSyaJ

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Odisha Lokayukta Bill passed in Assembly

(DD News, February 14, 2014)

The Odisha Legislative Assembly passed the Odisha Lokayukta Bill, 2014 with provision of keeping chief minister, ex-Chief Ministers, other ministers and public servants under the purview of a 6-member anti-corruption panel. The bill was unanimously passed after a two-day discussion. The Bill has provisions similar to that of the Central Act which was passed in Parliament in December, 2013.

As per the provisions of the Bill, the incumbent as well as former chief ministers, ministers, MLAs, government officers, heads of panchayats and municipalities and trusts receiving government grants will come under the purview of the Lokayukta who is empowered to probe into graft charges. NGOs, contractors (firm or persons) and suppliers dealing with government money would also be covered by it.

The Chairman of the Lokayukta will be either a sitting or former High Court judge. The commission would consist of at least two judicial members. From among their non-judicial members one would be either from women, scheduled caste, scheduled tribe or minority category on rotation basis.

The Lokayukta will be chosen by a selection committee headed by the chief minister and comprising others including the Leader of the Opposition, speaker of Odisha assembly, Chief Justice of Orissa High Court or a judge nominated by him and an eminent jurist nominated by the Governor.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kalpataru Das, who piloted the Bill on behalf of Chief Minister said, "I am not sure whether this Bill can completely eradicate corruption from the state. But, it will certainly help to curb the corrupt practice to a great extent."

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

Date Accessed: 19.02.2014

(Jeet Singh)

World Bank aids dairy sector in Assam

(Roopak Goswami, *The Telegraph*, February 16, 2014)

Focusing on supporting farmer's productivity enhancement and increasing organised market access, the World Bank has allocated Rs. 33 crores for the implementation of the Assam dairy development plan.

The Assam government had requested the Bank for financial help to fund the dairy development plan. According to a World Bank official, the state government has agreed to establish a bovine breeding policy and adopt common

protocols and standard operating procedures for implementing all breeding activities. The state government has also agreed to the rules for implementing the prevention and control of infectious diseases in animals.

According to the secretary of the Jamuna valley dairy cooperative society, the bank's intervention has increased the income of farmers, thereby motivating them to concentrate on cattle rearing.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140217/jsp/northeast/story_17945768.jsp#.UwMupvmSyaJ

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Tamil Nadu to spend Rs. 13,000 cr to improve infrastructure

(Arundhati Ramanathan, *LiveMint*, February 13, 2014)

The Tamil Nadu government has presented a no new-tax budget for 2014-2015 which seeks to improve infrastructure and promote industries in a "failing macro environment" to support economic growth in the state.

The state government will be spending about Rs.13, 000 crore in the next fiscal year to widen state highways, improve power infrastructure, and introduce new modes of urban transport like the Monorail.

To improve the state's ability to harness wind power, Tamil Nadu Transmission Corp. has proposed to set up a green energy corridor with an outlay of Rs.1,593 crore for evacuation of wind power with financial assistance from a German funding agency. As part of the financial restructuring plan for Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corp. Ltd, the government will take up liabilities worth Rs.2, 000 crore in 2014-15 in line with Centre's rehabilitation plan.

The government has also proposed steps to promote industries and entrepreneurs in the state.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/tX1OraW8cG90hAXGQpQ7EP/Tamil-Nadu-to-spend-13000-cr-to-improve-infrastructure.html>

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Maharashtra to introduce new toll policy soon

(PTI, February 13, 2014)

The Maharashtra government will soon draft a new policy on the issue of toll collection before the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections comes into force.

Maharashtra has the maximum number of roads in the country and under the new policy, the state government, shall take measures to eliminate toll on smaller roads and is contemplating buy back of smaller roads constructed on toll basis. Further, the state transport buses would be exempted from toll, so that the common man does not bear the brunt of the cost.

The government is contemplating a modern technology based on Radio-frequency identification (RFID) basis so that there will be a direct and transparent transaction in collection of toll, exempting vehicles from mandatory stoppage at toll plazas.

Further, the new policy shall provide for electronic monitoring of all toll booths and address the issue of toilets on highways.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/9tqlRpKkWiRvNW53umUUUI/Maharashtra-to-introduce-new-toll-policy-soon.html>

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014

(Deepti Somani)

SC asks Karnataka Chief Secretary to take steps to stop 'devadasi' system

(PTI, February 13, 2014)

The Supreme Court has directed the Karnataka Chief Secretary to take all steps to prevent women from being forced to become 'devadasis'. A 'devadasi' is a woman "dedicated" to worship and service of a deity or a temple for the rest of her life.

A bench headed by Chief Justice P Sathavism issued notice to the Karnataka government and asked it to file a response on the PIL seeking framing of guidelines to stop the tradition of 'devadasis', saying it is a national shame. The petitioner in the PIL alleged that the process of 'devadasi' dedication is still prevalent in different parts of the country despite the law against it and pleaded for the apex court's intervention in the matter.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/sc-asks-ktk-chief-sec-to-take-steps-to-stop-devadasi-system-114021300507_1.html

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Kerala to ease curbs on sand, rock mining

(The New Indian Express, February 14, 2014)

The government of Kerala decided to ease the existing stringent curbs on sand mining and rock mining in the state. The relaxations will be subject to environment clearances or regulatory bodies, court directives and guidelines. It has been decided to allow sand mining from reservoirs in the state. "Since dams are situated in forest areas, the clearance of the Union MoEF is also needed. If all guidelines are followed strictly, nothing can be allowed. Kerala's cases is unique," the Chief Minister said. He added that the Geology Department would look after restrictions and regulations for rock quarries and Revenue Department would be in control of sand mining areas.

The Chief Minister made it clear that the government will not resort to short cuts like imposing a ban on appointments to tide over the financial constraints of the state. "Under no circumstances, people will be burdened in the name of augmenting financial resources. Tax mobilisation will be strengthened. The reason for the financial stress experienced by the state is a shortfall in targeted growth of tax revenue. In other states, a cut in plan expenditure is being resorted to. Kerala will not do it," he said.

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/Kerala-Government-to-Ease-Curbs-on-Sand-Rock-Mining/2014/02/14/article2055841.ece#.UwcMnPmSyx->

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Anjana John)

NE States urge Centre to revise norms for SDRF

(The Nagaland Post, February 20th, 2014)

Participating in a three-day 'Training of Trainers' programme in Dimapur representatives of the eight Northeast states urged the Government of India to revise the norms for State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) and raise the ceilings taking into account the local needs of the region.

"The representatives of the Northeast states also urged the Government of India to make provision for procurement of area specific basic equipments which would be placed at the discretion of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA)." "The participants also put up their proposal to the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Disaster Management (DM) division to adopt plans and programmes specific to the topography of Northeastern region."

<http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/State/StateNews.aspx?news=TkVXUzEwMDA1NDc3OA%3d%3d>

Date Accessed: 21.02.2014
(Junty Sharma Pathak)

INDIA IN THE WORLD

India's national policy on Agroforestry to act as a global model

(Daniel Kapsoot, *The Guardian*, February 17, 2014)

India has taken the first step to formulate and adopt a comprehensive policy on agroforestry that aims at improving productivity, employment opportunities, income generation and the capacity to meet the ever-increasing demand for timber, food, fuel, fodder, fertiliser and fibre in the country.

Considering there are 500 million smallholder farms in the developing world supporting the livelihood of about 2 billion people currently, the Indian model has a lot to give for other countries mulling similar policies with regard to agroforestry.

The policy, which received its nod from the Parliament last week, is efficient in as much as it integrates trees into farmlands and rural landscapes in order to enhance productivity, profitability along with diversity and ecosystem diversity. The policy corresponds to the government's target of improving forest cover from its current under 25 per cent to 33 per cent through agroforestry.

Farmers are expected to benefit from incentives from agroforestry, insurance schemes and greater access to markets for agroforestry products. The policy also identifies the potential of agroforestry in mitigating climate change and helping farmers to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/feb/17/india-national-policy-agroforestry-tree-coverage>

Date Accessed: 18.02.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Australia, India to push for IMF quota reforms at G20

(*The Statesman*, February 20, 2014)

India and Australia will advocate the International Monetary Fund (IMF) quota reforms at the forthcoming two-day meeting of G20 finance ministers and Central Bank Governors. "We will actively lobby with the US (over the issue of IMF quota reforms)... US Congress must understand that it is in the interest of the US to reform the IMF," Joe Hockey, treasurer Australia, told reporters.

The IMF quota reforms, which seek to increase the voting share of emerging economies including India, had hit a roadblock with the USA Congress refusing to increase the American contribution to the multilateral body. India is likely to vigorously push for early completion of the IMF quota reforms at the ministerial meeting of the G20, a club of rich and developing nations. The meeting will be attended by Indian finance minister P Chidambaram and RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan.

The IMF reviews members' quotas once in five years and the last such review took place in December, 2010. India has already consented to its quota increase under the review though it would cost the exchequer Rs 14,000 crore. Once implemented, India's share will increase from the current 2.44 per cent to 2.75 per cent, following which the country will become the eighth largest quota holder at the IMF, up from the 11th position.

<http://www.thestatesman.net/news/40332-australia-india-to-push-for-imf-quota-reforms-at-g20.html>

Date Accessed: 19.02.2014

(Jeet Singh)

EAST AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

UN-mandated human rights inquiry on DPR Korea documents 'widespread, systematic abuses'

(UN News Centre, February 17, 2014)

This article highlights the findings of a report submitted by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

With a one-year mandate, the Commission was tasked with investigating several alleged violations against human rights. "The gravity, scale and nature of these violations reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world," the Commission – established by the Human Rights Council in March 2013 – says the report.

While the Government did not respond to requests for access to the DPRK and for information, the Commission obtained first-hand testimony through public hearings with about 80 witnesses and more than 240 confidential interviews with victims and other witnesses. Eighty formal submissions were also received from different entities.

The report finds that, since 1950, the "State's violence has been externalized through State-sponsored abductions and enforced disappearances of people from other nations."

The report includes a letter sent by the Commissioners to the Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-un, containing a summary of the human rights violations that "entail crimes against humanity." The letter states that the Commission would recommend referral of the situation in the DPRK to the International Criminal Court.

The Commission is scheduled to formally present its findings to the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 17 March 2014.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47160&Cr=Korea&Cr1=#.UwMZIfmSyVI>

Date Accessed: 18.2.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

AFRICA

Over 850,000 Somalis desperately need food: UN study

(The Indian Express, February 19, 2014)

More than 850,000 people in Somalia are in need of food and in crisis and emergency conditions, the director of UN humanitarian operations said. Another two million Somalis are considered to be "food insecure." "These figures indicate a simple message which is that the situation in Somalia for Somalis on the humanitarian side is very grave." The UN World Food Program's Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit reported that 8,57,000 Somalis are in acute crisis conditions and require urgent humanitarian assistance. This is "a modest improvement" from the previous six months when 870,000 Somalis desperately needed food.

Somalia has long been a rudderless nation plagued by cyclical drought and famine and decades of armed conflict. Its population is estimated to be about 10 million. The food security unit of UN said about 75 per cent of the 857,000 Somalis who urgently need food are displaced from their homes, largely as a result of fighting, insecurity and lack of food. Others are in rural areas that are very hard to access. The United Nations appealed for USD 933 million for the humanitarian crisis in Somalia this year, but so far it has received only USD 36 million which is "very ominous."

<http://indianexpress.com/article/world/middle-east-africa/un-says-over-850000-somalis-desperately-need-food/>

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014

(Anjana John)

Slow Food youth gardens in Africa promote nutrition and sustainability: FAO

(FAO, February 17, 2014)

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN has lauded the planned expansion of a Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity gardening project for young Africans, saying it was part of a much-needed "paradigm shift" to place more importance on family farming, sustainable food and agriculture systems, and the transfer of traditional knowledge from one generation to the next.

"Food gardens produce far more than simply food. They promote inclusion, teach sustainability, and offer a space where the youth of today can meet, learn, share and build social capital, and food gardening opened the door to opportunities to decent jobs and a dignified life." In May 2013, FAO and the international Slow Food organization agreed to develop joint actions to improve the livelihoods of smallholders and others working in rural areas. The promotion of local food gardens that could involve entire families and hand down traditional know-how and food culture from one generation to the next could help to "transform the youth of today into tomorrow's leaders, protagonists of local, national and international food security and sustainable development policy- and decision-making." "Family farming is an important path for inclusion for millions of poor rural families and communities, and is of special importance for women and for youth."

<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/214135/icode/>

Date Accessed: 19.02.2014

(Anjana John)

AMERICAS

A shift from "Prohibition" approach to a "Medical Support Program" for drug addicts in the U.S.

(*The Daily Beast*, February 18, 2014)

In order to counter the rising drug addiction in the U.S., the article advocates a shift from "law enforcement and prohibition centred" approach to "regulation" of drug markets. A medical support system, like heroin maintenance, is a program in which pharmaceutical or "clean heroin" is provided in a controlled and clinical setting to addicts who have not benefited from traditional and approved treatments. The major benefit of the proposed regulation is the surety of dose and purity of drugs. Many advocates have highlighted that such public health approaches are a big step towards ending the stigmatization of drug users.

The article points out that lack of sensitive and effective structure to support drug addicts has been largely responsible for the rising numbers of deaths due to drug overdose. According to the Center for Disease Control, "38,329 people died from a drug overdose in the United States in 2010." According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, from 2006-2010, that was a 21% increase. Death by heroin increased 45 percent during the same period. Additionally, "opioids were involved in about 3 of every 4 pharmaceutical overdose deaths." The vast supply of pharmaceutical drugs, like Oxycontin, is also pointed to be one of the primary reasons of addiction crisis in the U.S.

Allan Clear, executive director of the Harm Reduction Coalition, advocates for injection drug users. Such a maintenance program will extend medical community help to addicts and also prescribe the right dosage. She adds that the addicts will not be forced to buy street heroine which is of bad quality. Quality control will also help mitigate some of the adverse reactions to heroin. The program will also be cost effective and better for the public health than prohibition. Countries like Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Canada, and England are examples of nations implementing heroine maintenance program to help addicts in rehabilitation and reduce the illicit drugs market.

However, opponents have argued that such a program would, in fact, encourage addiction. Moreover, Calvina L. Fay, Director of the Drug Free America Foundation, also reports that “most opiate addicts are addicted to several drugs” and the program will not address the addiction problem of other drugs. The most severe side effect some users experience from heroin maintenance is osteoporosis after long-term use.

http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/02/18/legal-regulated-heroin-could-have-saved-philip-seymour-hoffman.html?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=cheatsheet_morning&cid=newsletter%3Bemail%3Bcheatsheet_morning&utm_term=Cheat%20Sheet

Date Accessed: 17.02.2014
(Mahima Malik)

India, Argentina to strengthen ties in renewable energy

(ANI News, February 20, 2014)

India and Argentina have agreed to enhance cooperation in the field of renewable energy. India, for New and Renewable Energy conveyed the willingness to enhance bilateral ties and economic cooperation with Argentina especially in the field of renewable energy. Collaboration in sectors of bio-diesel and possibilities of future commerce and business in bio-fuel were also discussed during the meeting between the two countries. It was agreed that the two countries should use their full potential to enhance cooperation and bilateral ties.

The Indian approach to bio fuels which is based solely on non-food feedstock will be raised on degraded or wastelands that are not suited to agriculture, or through use of wastes and residues, thus avoiding a possible conflict of fuel and food security. According to Farooq Abdullah, union minister for New and Renewable Energy, India is on a rapid growth of the renewable energy sector.

<http://www.aninews.in/newsdetail3/story156015/india-argentina-to-strengthen-ties-in-renewable-energy.html>

Date Accessed: 20.02.2014
(Anjana John)

RAJIV GANDHI INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

