

# RGICS POLICY WATCH

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## NEW FROM RGICS

### 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

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- SC sets up panel to regulate government ad spend on politicians
- India is world's biggest arms importer: Swedish think tank
- How a low-tech solution is making a dent in Africa's gigantic fake medicine trade

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.

## Empowering choice : The Case for NOTA

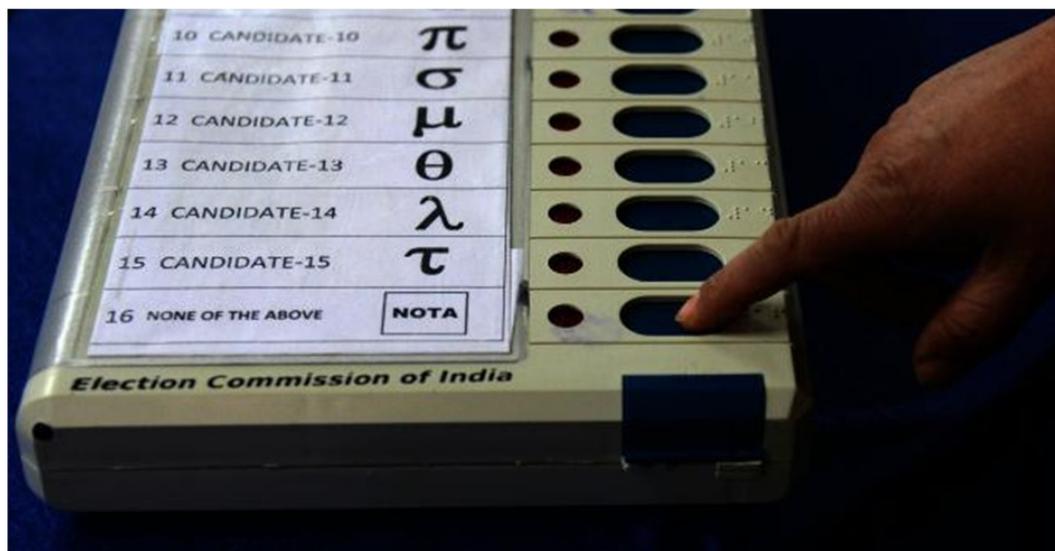


Photo: V. Sudershan, The Hindu

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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.

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**

## Empowering choice : The Case for NOTA

### Genesis:

The idea of introducing a “None of the above” option on the ballot had been floated by the Election Commission of India (ECI) as early as 2001, however, lack of government support had allowed the idea to languish until the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), an NGO filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in support of it. In an article entitled “Right of negative voting” (Indian Express, 2009), eminent jurist and former Attorney-General Soli J. Sorabjee noted that there was a difference between the right to cast a negative vote and a voter refusing to exercise his franchise at all. It is for this reason that in their writ filed in the Supreme Court (SC), PUCL held that “a citizen’s right to vote at an election in secrecy includes the right of negative voting qua all candidates.”<sup>1</sup>

On 27 September 2013, the SC ruled that the right to register a “none of the above” vote in elections should apply, and they ordered the ECI to ensure that a NOTA button would be available on voting machines. The Supreme Court held that the provisions of Rule 49-O under which an elector not wishing to vote for any candidate had to inform the Presiding Officer about his decision, were in violation of a citizen’s rights under Article 19 of the Constitution and Section 128 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 to cast a secret ballot.<sup>2</sup>

The Bench comprising then Chief Justice P. Sathasivam and Justices Ranjana Desai and Ranjan Gogoi, was of the opinion that the NOTA option “will accelerate effective political participation in the present state of the democratic system and the voters will in fact be empowered.” In the judgement, the CJI said, “Such an option gives the voter the right to express his disapproval of the kind of candidates being put up by the parties. Gradually, there will be a systemic change and the parties will be forced to accept the will of the people and field candidates who are known for their integrity.”<sup>3</sup>

However, though the right of the citizen to voice dissatisfaction with the candidates presented has been recognised, NOTA cannot be seen as anything more than a symbolic gesture since it does not amount to a right to reject candidates or force a re-election if enough votes are cast for the NOTA option. The SC in the same ruling also said that as per the provisions of clause (a) of Rule 64 of Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, read with Section 65 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, the candidate who has polled the largest number of valid votes is to be declared elected by the Returning Officer. This means that if in a constituency 90 of 100 available votes are cast in favour of the NOTA option, the candidate who gets the most number of the remaining 10 votes will be declared the winner. The Election Commission also clarified that the NOTA votes are considered as invalid votes and will not be considered for determining the forfeiture of security deposit.<sup>4</sup>

### Current Functioning:

The ECI made the option available to voters starting the November 2013 assembly elections. Though, we will be able to better analyse role of the NOTA trend in elections once it has been a part of more election cycles, data gathered from the assembly elections suggest mixed reviews and results.

Though the quality of candidates has not dramatically improved, voter turnout especially in urban areas has jumped. But many analysts have cautioned against attributing this to apathetic urban voters coming out to vote NOTA. Data from the assembly elections suggests that NOTA votes cast were actually higher in areas where the rural population was higher and also higher in areas where illiteracy was higher.

Sanjay Kumar, Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies said in an article in *Mint* that of the 630 assembly constituencies where elections were held last November (Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh), there were 401 assembly constituencies where vote for NOTA was less than 2 per cent, and these constituencies had more than 45 per cent urban voters. In another 194 assembly constituencies where less than 20 per cent voters were urban voters, NOTA votes were between 2 per cent to 4 per cent.

In another 32 assembly constituencies, NOTA votes were in the range of 4.1 per cent to 8 per cent and these constituencies were largely rural, with only about 5-6 per cent urban voters. The three assembly constituencies in Chhattisgarh where NOTA votes were more than 8 per cent, the voters were almost entirely rural (95 per cent).

On another parameter, in 401 assembly constituencies where NOTA votes were below 2 per cent, about 70 per cent voters were literate (only 30 per cent illiterate voters), while in 194 assembly constituencies where NOTA votes were between 2 per cent to 4 per cent, 60 per cent voters were literate. In another 32 assembly constituencies where NOTA votes were between 4 per cent to 8 per cent, only 52 per cent voters were literate (48 per cent illiterate voters), while in another three assembly constituencies where NOTA votes were the highest (more than 8 per cent) only 30 per cent voters were literate.

However, he cautioned that these NOTA votes might well be in the nature of mistakes made by the voters due to low awareness. Indeed voter awareness regarding NOTA is low and the ECI has done very little to educate them on this new option.<sup>5</sup>

### **Future of NOTA:**

India does not it would seem have a cynical electorate. People would much rather vote in favour of a candidate than against the entire political system. Voting NOTA is seen as a cop out or a “waste of a vote”. In an environment where NOTA cannot force a re-election, they are probably not entirely wrong.

But for a section of the population, voting in an election is not an exercise of picking a winner. It is their most powerful opportunity to make their voices and opinions on the people representing them in the political system heard. Even if they don't otherwise fall into a category whose grievances are regularly heard and addressed, once every 5 years, they too can make their voices heard and it is an opportunity they take very seriously. It is important in a democracy that people be able to stand up and say that they feel that none of these candidates represent their interests and do not therefore have their vote. For these people, voting is their most powerful act of non violent protest.

Villagers of Poigaikaraipatti near the Alagarkovil hills, who have been fighting against a private chemical factory in their area that has polluted their ground water, claim they have opted for None of the Above (NOTA) option. They felt compelled to boycott a list of candidates that had failed to address their most pressing issue<sup>6</sup>. 300 families of Ambedkar Nagar village, Kanpur will be pressing the NOTA button on the voting machine, in the hope that their collective protest will help focus political attention on the fact that for three decades, they have had to make do with little or no civic infrastructure<sup>7</sup>. Families evicted from a slum in east Kolkata are threatening to vote NOTA because none of the candidates addressed their demand for a proper rehabilitation scheme<sup>8</sup>.

NOTA should be promoted and strengthened not because it is an exercise to drag apathetic voters to the polling booth and raise electorate participation in this greatest of democratic exercises, but because it is an opportunity for the political class to listen to those they represent and select better candidates. It will only become a tool capable of effecting real changes when voting NOTA has the power to effect the outcome of an election. The next government must make every effort to protect and enhance the right of the people to participate more actively in the selection of their elected representatives.

By Gayatri Verma

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2. [http://eci.nic.in/eci\\_main1/current/PN\\_28102013.pdf](http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/current/PN_28102013.pdf)
3. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/voter-has-right-to-negative-voting-sc/article5174414.ece?homepage=true>
4. [http://eci.nic.in/eci\\_main/ElectoralLaws/OrdersNotifications/NOTA\\_11102013.pdf](http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/ElectoralLaws/OrdersNotifications/NOTA_11102013.pdf)
5. <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/b6ZPsuUYS2G3fWR2KItpaJ/Is-NOTA-serving-any-purpose.html>
6. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/lok-sabha-elections-2014/news/Left-with-no-option-villagers-press-NOTA-button/articleshow/34171179.cms>
7. (<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/fMBLoDdkssrq74VDXLXWSM/A-village-ready-to-vote-for-Nota.html>)
8. (<http://www.ndtv.com/elections/article/election-2014/kolkata-evicted-slum-dwellers-threaten-to-exercise-nota-option-511480>).

## SC sets up panel to regulate government ad spend on politicians

*(Domain B. com, April 23, 2014)*

The Supreme Court has announced the constitution of a three-member committee that would frame guidelines aimed at regulating spending on advertisements by politicians. A three-member bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice P. Sathasivam held that there was a need for stringent checks against excess spending on public advertisements published in the media by both the central and state governments.

There have been a few instances that made the need of such guidelines on the mentioned issue important. For example, President Pranab Mukherjee, based on Delhi Lokayukta Justice Manmohan Sarin's recommendations, had directed the Delhi government's department of welfare for SC/ST/OBC and minority community "to be careful" in publicising their policies. Justice Sarin had also recommended to the President that an advisory be issued to chief minister Sheila Dikshit and PWD minister Raj Kumar Chauhan asking them to desist from putting their photographs on application forms offering loan at low rates under the 'Dilli Swarojgar Yojna'.

The decision of the apex court was in response to a Public Interest Litigation filed by two NGOs, Common Cause and Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL), on the issue. "The petition had sought issuance of guidelines for curbing ruling parties from projecting their leaders in official advertisements and taking political mileage." Counsel for Common Cause had argued that the glorification of politicians linked to the ruling establishment, in order to attain political mileage at the cost of public exchequer, was in violation of Article 14 of the Constitution.

The bench said that the SC will have to issue comprehensive guidelines in the larger public interest till Parliament enacts a law on the subject.

[http://www.domain-b.com/economy/Govt/20140423\\_politicians.html](http://www.domain-b.com/economy/Govt/20140423_politicians.html)

Date Accessed: 19.04.2014

(Mahima Malik)

## India is world's biggest arms importer: Swedish think tank

*(The Hindu, March 17, 2014)*

India remains the biggest buyer of arms in the world, importing nearly three times as many weapons as imported by China and Pakistan over the last five years, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a Swedish think tank. Indian imports of major weapons rose by 111 per cent in the last five years compared to 2004-08.

India replaced China as the world's biggest arms buyer in 2010. The world's top five arms importers are India, China, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. India's share of total global arms imports increased from 7 to 14 per cent. India's domestic defence industry is struggling to manufacture high-tech arms, in comparison to better-equipped Chinese forces and a range of military challenges in its volatile neighbourhood. The main supplier of arms to India in 2009-13 was Russia, accounting for 75 per cent of all imports. India has lately sought to diversify its sources. Other U.S. research shows that India became the biggest buyer of US weapons last year – with total imports worth \$1.9 billion.

The research also gives trend of other countries' imports of arms. Pakistan increased its weapons acquisitions by 119 per cent, growing from 2 per cent of the global total to 5 per cent during that period. Arms exports to Africa between 2004-08 and 2009-13 jumped 53 per cent. "Imports by European nations decreased by 25 per cent between 2004-2008 and 2009-13". Britain was the largest importer of major weapons in Europe (receiving 12 per cent of deliveries), followed by Azerbaijan (12 per cent) and Greece (11 per cent).

Explaining the reason for increased imports of arms by South Asian countries, Siemon Wezeman, senior researcher with the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme said that “Chinese, Russian and US arms supplies to South Asia are driven by both economic and political considerations...to strengthen their influence in the region.”

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-is-worlds-biggest-arms-importer-swedish-think-tank/article5794929.ece>

Date Accessed: 24.04.2014

(Mahima Malik)

## How a low-tech solution is making a dent in Africa's gigantic fake medicine trade

(Tshepo Tshabalala, *smartplanet.com*, April 18, 2014)

In Africa, counterfeit drugs contribute to the deaths of 100,000 people annually as people die from diseases their "medicine" is supposedly treating. According to WHO estimates, one in four packets of medicine sold in street markets in developing countries could be fake. While many global companies are developing ways to fight this counterfeit trade, Ghana's Bright Simons has come up with mPedigree, a low-tech mobile application that verifies the authenticity of medication with a text message using the most basic cell phone.



Since its inception in various African countries, the system has had an average of over 35,000 weekly verifications. According to Technology Review, mPedigree helped reveal to a major Indian company pilfering at a depot in which genuine anti-malarial medicines were being replaced by counterfeits.

mPedigree works by having manufacturers upload information from each pack of medicine into a central registry that allows it to show a record of possession from the manufacturer through various wholesalers and pharmacies to the user. The consumer can easily check authenticity of the product by scratching the product surface to view a hidden 12 digit number and sending a free SMS message to verify it.

The mPedigree platform protects consumers from counterfeit drugs in regions with low literacy and low technical capacity. Through working with about 20 telecoms companies, Pedigree has appeared in 6.5 million packs of medicine. Distributors and other middlemen can check the codes to verify that the supply has not been compromised. mPedigree's system has been adopted as the national standard also in Kenya and India, with pilots in Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa and Bangladesh.

<http://www.smartplanet.com/blog/global-observer/how-a-low-tech-solution-is-making-a-dent-in-africas-gigantic-fake-medicine-trade/>

Date Accessed: 24.04.2014

(Amrutha Jose Pampackal)

## **ICAI to issue norms on fraud reporting by auditors**

(Sushmi Dey, *Business Standard*, April 24, 2014)

The new Companies Act made it mandatory for auditors to report corporate frauds to the government within a specified time frame, following which Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) will soon bring out a guidance note for auditors on detecting corporate fraud.

ICAI's Auditing & Assurance Standards Board has constituted an expert panel to examine the provisions for fraud reporting, identify practical implementation issues and develop appropriate implementation guidance for the auditors, said ICAI president K Raghu.

"This is for the first time that such responsibility of reporting on frauds directly to the Central government has been given to the statutory auditors... It is felt that this reporting requirement is quite demanding from the statutory auditors' perspective," said Raghu, adding the ICAI guidelines would help auditors report frauds at the earliest after detecting them.

He added that new law has placed "considerable responsibility" on statutory auditors and is "quite demanding" from their perspective. In recent years, many instances of alleged corporate misdeeds and financial frauds have come to light in companies such as Satyam and Reebok.

[http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/icai-to-issue-norms-on-fraud-reporting-by-auditors-114042400019\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/icai-to-issue-norms-on-fraud-reporting-by-auditors-114042400019_1.html)

Date Accessed: 24.4.2014

(Shruti Issar)

## **Infrastructure loans emerge as banks' biggest stress point**

(Dinesh Unnikrishnana, *Live Mint*, April 25, 2014)

The asset quality of bank loans to infrastructure developers is deteriorating at a faster pace than that of loans advanced to any other sector, underlining the challenge the next government will face in reviving investment and kick-starting stalled projects.

As of 31 March 2014, banks had restructured Rs.50,239 crore of loans they had given to the infrastructure sector—21% of all loans they recast in the last fiscal year under the so-called corporate debt restructuring (CDR) mechanism.

Restructured loans to public works projects swelled from Rs.21,912 crore (9.57% of the total) in the previous year and Rs.16,774 crore (11.14%) in the year before that.

Total loans restructured by banks via CDR, on a cumulative basis, rose to Rs.3.3 trillion as of 31 March, from Rs.2.3 trillion a year ago. The figure does not reflect the total amount of restructured loans in the banking system because banks also recast loans on a bilateral basis outside the CDR platform.

A slump in economic growth to the slowest pace in a decade, coupled with delayed project approvals such as environment and forest clearances, problems in land acquisition and high borrowing costs have hit developers of long-gestation and capital-intensive infrastructure projects particularly hard.

Experts warn of more pain emerging from the segment before the worst is over. About 40% of total infrastructure loans are likely to be restructured by March 2015 as against 20% in March 2013, rating agency India Ratings and Research Pvt. Ltd said in a recent report.

<http://www.livemint.com/Industry/pL0WQVfieHpt74yvYjN6BM/infrastructure-loans-emerge-as-the-biggest-stress-point-for.html>

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014

(Neha Singh)

## **FTP to focus on services exports, branding & standardization**

*(Exim News Service, April 20, 2014)*

The Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) for 2014-19, which is expected to be announced in June, is expected to widen its focus on various issues, including services sector shipments, standards and branding of products to enhance export performance. India's exports in the last three years have been hovering around USD 300 billion and now there is a need to boost it further and enhance its contribution in the world trade, as per the officials.

International rules prohibit India from giving export subsidies to a sector if outbound shipments cross 3.5% of its share in the global market.

The exercise to formulate the policy is already in process and the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade is consulting all stakeholders in this regard.

<http://www.eximin.net/NewsDetails.aspx?name=75449>

[http://zeenews.india.com/business/news/economy/ftp-to-focus-on-services-exports-branding-of-products\\_97884.html](http://zeenews.india.com/business/news/economy/ftp-to-focus-on-services-exports-branding-of-products_97884.html)

Date Accessed: 24.4.2014

(Shruti Issar)

## **RBI may hike rates steeply if monsoon is weak**

*(MoneyControl, April 25, 2014)*

If El Nino conditions are fully factored in, agriculture GDP growth may be lower by 250-300 bps (current estimate 3.3 percent) and average retail inflation may be 100 bps higher (current estimate 7.6 percent).

With the prospect of a weak monsoon looming, the Reserve Bank of India in the coming monetary policy may take a hawkish stance. The Indian Meteorological Department has forecast June-September monsoon at around 95 percent of Long Period Average (LPA), which qualifies as 'sub-normal' southwest monsoons.

According to report by Kotak Securities it would be premature to factor in in weak agriculture production right away. But if El Nino conditions are fully factored in, agriculture GDP growth may be lower by 250-300 bps (current estimate 3.3 percent) and average retail inflation may be 100 bps higher (current estimate 7.6 percent).

According to the report, "while higher food prices may not necessarily prompt immediate action from the RBI, it would keenly watch the secondary inflationary impact on the manufactured products (in WPI) and services sectors (in CPI). The RBI will deal with signs of sustained increase in core inflation swiftly. Given the current probabilities of an El Nino-induced weak monsoon and associated inflationary impact, there are significantly higher chances of the RBI hiking policy rates than the markets may be expecting. It will also be interesting to watch the new government's reaction to adverse agricultural implications in terms of (1) the fiscal-side reaction and (2) logistics management to avert significant agricultural price distortions."

[http://www.moneycontrol.com/news/economy/rbi-may-hike-rates-steeply-if-monsoon-is-weak-kotak-report\\_1074226.html?utm\\_source=ref\\_article](http://www.moneycontrol.com/news/economy/rbi-may-hike-rates-steeply-if-monsoon-is-weak-kotak-report_1074226.html?utm_source=ref_article)

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014

(Karishma Mutreja)

## India one of the fastest-growing countries in the plastic money segment

(*The Hindu*, April 23, 2014)

The Reserve Bank of India report, 'Enabling Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) in Payment System Applications', reveals that 369 million debit and credit cards in the country, around 10-15 per cent, are used only for online transactions. Further, it reported that India is one of the fastest-growing countries in the plastic money segment.

Debit cards entered India in 1998 and they currently account for almost 95 per cent of the total number of cards in circulation. Today, India has close to 350 million debit cards and 19 million credit cards in circulation.

Credit cards have shown relatively slower growth even though they entered the market one decade before debit cards. A majority of credit card purchases come from expenses on jewellery, dining and shopping.

Information reveals that credit cards have a higher share in the discretionary category whereas debit cards dominate in routine expenses like utility payments. The RBI said electronic payments dominate their expenses: rail/airfare (71 per cent), durable goods (61 per cent), rent (49 per cent), tele/mobile (47 per cent), medical institutions (46 per cent), clothing/footwear (44 per cent), beverages and refreshments (35 per cent).

The RBI quoted reports from two major payment networks, MasterCard and Visa. According to MasterCard, 75 per cent of all card payments are concentrated in top 20 cities with Delhi, Mumbai and their suburbs alone accounting for 43 per cent. A Visa study reveals that people in the monthly income band of Rs 75,000-100,000 are the most prolific users of electronic cards.

<http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/only-1015-cards-used-for-online-transactions-rbi-report/article5940415.ece?ref=sliderNews>

Date Accessed: 20.04.2014

(Mahima Malik)

## Pre-election flood of fake currency

(Sameer Patil, *Gateway House*, March 31, 2014)

Fake currency, widely in circulation in India, has become a serious threat with counterfeiters taking advantage of the election season to pump in more money. Despite the severity of the threat posed by counterfeits, security agencies in India don't have a uniform estimate of the fake currency in circulation but claim that at any given time 3% or Rs. 35,000 crores of the total currency in circulation in India is counterfeit.

Till recently, higher denomination notes dominated the fake market. But counterfeiters are now printing smaller denominations too – Rs. 10 and Rs. 20 – which are harder to detect or seize, and have the potential to cause a loss of confidence in the Indian Rupee. Our security agencies suspect that anti-India elements may have compromise some employees within one of the 11 companies India import papers from to get access to the genuine currency paper.

India has implemented counter-measures, but must utilise advanced techniques and sensitise local law enforcement machinery to counter the menace. We must implement advanced forensic measures which analyse the intaglio ink, watermarking techniques, security thread, and the paper used in fake currency. This will enable India to maintain a comprehensive database of each fake note recovered, and take action against the support networks. We also need to complement the efforts of the central security agencies, by substantively informing the local law enforcement machinery and judicial authorities about the gravity of the problem.

<http://www.gatewayhouse.in/pre-election-flood-of-fake-currency/>

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014

(Gayatri Verma)

## POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

### Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee to submit report on poll malpractices to EC

(Correspondent Kohima, *Nagaland Post*, Apr 23, 2014)

Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) will approach the Election Commission of India (ECI) to submit proof of anomalies with documentary evidence including video- photography, which occurred during the April 9 polling in Nagaland for the 16th Lok Sabha in Nagaland.

INC candidate K.V. Pusa while speaking to media persons informed that “it was unfortunate, that when voters in Nagaland did not turn up in large numbers, a handful of stooges working for some politically motivated elite took advantage of the situation, which resulted in an abnormal voting percentage that exceeded the actual voter turnout.” In this regard, he alleged that “as per the figures tallied by the Congress 986 polling stations recorded over 90% voter turnout, while the voter turnout in 48 polling stations, and was more than 100 %”.

Pusa also demanded that “polling officers, who reported that everything was alright despite failing to perform their duties as per ECI guidelines, should be taken to task.” He added that very few voters used Elector’s Voter Identity Card (EPIC) which resulted in anomalies like very high voter turnout and stated that “proxy voting and booth capturing enabled the high voter turn which was officially recorded at 88.57%.”

The NPCC president also said “there was a dire need to check on the role of village councils since they have over ridden the democratic process by openly issuing diktats for supporting a particular candidate.” Congress party functionaries have “alleged that the Village Development Board secretary of Hak village and the pastor of Hak Baptist Church, had cast votes on behalf of the entire village after education minister C.M. Chang promised construction of the church building if the village voted cent per cent for the NPF candidate on April 9.”

POLLING STATION/DISTRICT	TOTAL VOTERS	VOTE CAST-ED
Elumyo (Tyui AC)- Wokha District	516	517
Lichuyan- Bhandari A/C, Wokha	32	34
Shurhiba (Phek A/C)- Phek District	77	79
Satheri (Phek A/C)- Phek District	117	144
Waziho A/Wing - Meluri A/C Phek District	239	244
Kiyetha (Suruhoto A/C)- Zunheboto	155	168
A/Saghemi-N (Suruhoto A/C) Zunheboto	500	507
Achikuchu (Suruhoto A/C) Zunheboto	547	548
Tuzhumi (Suruhoto A/C) Zunheboto	165	168
Akuba (Suruhoto A/C) Zunheboto	287	289
Nihoshe (Suruhoto A/C)- Zunheboto	350	358
Vihhepu (Sataka A/C)- Zunheboto	441	442
Tsuthoho (Sataka A/C)- Zunheboto	363	365
Amhator (Seyochung-Sitimi A/C)- Kiphiri	780	786

<http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/State/StateNews.aspx?news=TkVXUzEwMDA1ODY1Mw%3d%3d>

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014

(Junty Sharma Pathak)

## **'Certainty' will be agenda with India's new Govt: US industry**

*(The Business line, 25 April, 2014)*

The US industries have hinted that they want “predictability, certainty and transparency” in India’s economic and trade policies, and this would be its agenda with the new government to be formed after the poll results of the Lok Sabha elections.

This would be the foundational issue for the future of Indo-US relationship and once the new government is in place in India, the US industry will look forward to a rekindling of bilateral dialogues, including the Trade Policy. The agenda laid down by the US government for the new Indian government includes tax, intellectual property, defense, immigration reform, and legacy issues.

One of the official said “Retroactive and unpredictable taxation has become a global headline concern. Companies cannot and will not invest in a country that is lacking a clear and predictable tax policy. Some progress has been made, but more work needs to be done in order to resolve the perception of gridlock”.

While on the subject of tax, USIBC member companies look forward to the adoption of a new Goods and Services Tax (GST)-a unifying, predictable approach that will dramatically increase Government revenue and ease the movement of goods across India. US industries also expressed their concern about the Intellectual property right. Companies need assurances that their hard fought and earned intellectual capital will be protected.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/international/certainty-will-be-agenda-with-indias-new-govt-us-industry/article5946262.ece>

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014

(Neha Singh)

## **SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EXCLUSION**

### **Council decides to publish results offline due to delay in online evaluation process in Odisha**

*(Times Of India, April 25, 2014)*

With the aim of causing no further delays in the evaluation of answersheets for the vocational courses, the Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE) has decided to continue with offline evaluation.

The e-evaluation process was supposed to be initiated on a pilot basis for the vocational courses first before it could be extended to other streams. Following government’s directions, the CHSE had deferred the evaluation of papers for vocational cases. But as stated by the CHSE chairman, Basudeb Chhatoi, the evaluation had already been postponed due to the online process and the board can wait further.

Currently, the council is trying hard to publish results of XIIth standard science students by the end of May. According to the council, the deadline for the publication of results of the science stream needs to be met as these will be needed by students who have applied for JEE and IIT.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/entrance-exams/Aborted-e-evaluation-for-vocational-stream/articleshow/34171341.cms>

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

## EDUCATION

### HRW report recommends special focus should on the retention of children in schools till they are 14 years old

(Jagran Josh, April 23, 2014)

Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report titled “They Say We’re Dirty: Denying an Education to India’s Marginalized” to examine continuing obstacles to proper implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. The findings of the report are based on a survey across four states, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Delhi.

The report recommends that focus should be on the retention of children in schools till they are 14 years old. For this, a system to monitor and track all children from enrolment to the time they reach grade VIII needs to be established. Along with this, a uniform protocol needs to be set up for identifying children who are out of school, have dropped out, or are at risk of dropping out.

Right to Education (RTE) Act came into effect in 2010. The report observes how marginalized children are excluded and denied rights to child-friendly and equitable environment promised under the Act.

Report Highlights: • Discriminations in classrooms and schools is a major factor impeding access to education for children of Dalits, tribal groups, Muslims and other marginalised sections.

- The students of disadvantaged sections brought into education mainstream faces discrimination, get isolated in class and are insulted in public.
- The discrimination are in various forms which includes teachers asking dalit children to sit separately or making insulting remarks about Muslim and tribal students and village authorities not responding when girls are kept away from classroom.
- Teachers and other students often address children using derogatory terms for their caste, community, tribe or religion.
- In some schools, dalit children are not considered for leadership roles such as class monitor because of caste or community. Many are expected to perform unpleasant tasks like cleaning toilets.
- Marginalised neighborhood schools have the poorest infrastructure and least trained teachers and many schools have fewer teachers than required.

<http://www.jagranjosh.com/current-affairs/hrw-report-they-say-were-dirty-denying-an-education-to-indias-marginalized-released-1398258468-1>

Date Accessed: 20.04.2014

(Mahima Malik)

## HEALTH

### India needs a proper mechanism to regulate clinical trials

(Kundan Pandey, *Down To Earth*, April 22, 2014)

While 506 victims of unethical drug trials suffering from serious adverse effects (SAE) await their compensation still from either the Centre or the pharmaceutical companies conducting these trials, there is an urgent need to put a proper mechanism in place for the same. A petition was filed by Swasthya Adhikar Manch (SAM)- an Indore-based non-profit organisation- alleging multinational companies of exploiting loopholes in the law to run unethical drug trials.

The Supreme Court, last year, had restrained the Central government from giving permission for clinical trial of new drugs without having a regulatory mechanism for conducting these trials. After ensuring compensation for the relatives of 80 families who died during trials, it is currently looking into the issue of non-payment of compensatory money to survivors suffering from SAE.

According to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), drug trials were conducted on 39,022 people during 2005 -2012. Out of them, 80 died and 506 developed SAE. However, the article states that an RTI revealed that there were 2,031 deaths caused die to such trials.

While the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has responded stating that there are no rules relating to the payment of compensation, counsel for SAM referred to the Drugs and Cosmetic Rules 1945 that provides for compensation to victims by the government. They also pointed out the lack of monitoring of the process and manner in which these trials are conducted once the sponsors acquire the permission leading to an unaware government that does not have adequate knowledge about the gravity of impact.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/drug-trials-sc-pulls-centre-not-compensating-victims-who-suffered-severe-adverse-effects>

Date Accessed: 24.04.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

## URBAN

### Water project for Bhubaneswar in pipeline

(*The New Indian Express*, April 28, 2014)

The Odisha Government is contemplating to take up urban water supply project in Twin City Bhubaneswar and Cuttack in the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode. The Government has sought response from the Ministry of Urban Development in this regard since the latter had floated the PPP mode to address urban water supply challenges. In fact, the ministry will bear about 15 per cent cost of the project.

Funding for the project could be sourced either from the World Bank or from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JN NURM). The Urban Development department held a meeting recently to discuss the proposals mooted by the ministry. Representatives of the World Bank were also present at the meeting which stressed on the need for handing over responsibilities of such projects to the cities. "Since the ministry will support one city in each State for such a project in the PPP mode, the Urban Development department is pitching in for Bhubaneswar-Cuttack urban area for the proposal. Since such a project will have a third party stake-holding, the State Government has sought a clear legal and revenue framework to be defined."

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/Water-Project-for-Twin-City-in-Pipeline/2014/04/28/article2193596.ece>

Date Accessed: 28.04.2014

(Anjana John)

## TECHNOLOGY

### How to tackle arsenic poisoning and build roads at the same go!

(Janet Fang, *smartplanet.com*, March 29, 2014)

About 100 million people worldwide are exposed to toxic concentrations of naturally occurring arsenic in ground-water supplies, the vast majority living in rural Bangladesh and India (West Bengal, Bihar). The slow accumulation of arsenic in the body causes skin lesions, gangrene, multiple types of cancer, cardiovascular diseases, reduced IQ in children, neuropathy and premature death. The world's largest case of mass arsenic poisoning is probably occurring in West Bengal and Bangladesh where over 60 million people drink groundwater that's contaminated with naturally occurring arsenic. In some cases, the arsenic exceeds 1000 parts per billion (ppb), the World Health Organization's recommended maximum limit for arsenic in drinking water being 10 ppb.

While many technologies have failed in removing arsenic from water at the village level, Ashok Gadgil of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and a UC Berkeley team led by Susan Amrose have invented a system that filters arsenic out of water cheaply. They're now working with cement and concrete companies to figure out a way to embed the resulting sludge in building materials.

They have come up with Electrochemical Arsenic Remediation (ECAR), which binds arsenic using iron dissolved in water. They've also conceptualized a business model for locals to implement the tech in the long term. The team started working on the concept in 2005, and now they're planning a trial to filter 10,000 liters of water every day in rural sites over 15 months.

"I think stabilizing hazardous waste in concrete is something that's going to become more common. It makes sense, because there are so many roads being built in India right now", says Amrose.

<http://www.smartplanet.com/blog/bulletin/arsenic-out-of-groundwater-and-into-concrete/>

Date Accessed: 24.04.2014  
(Amrutha Jose Pampackal)

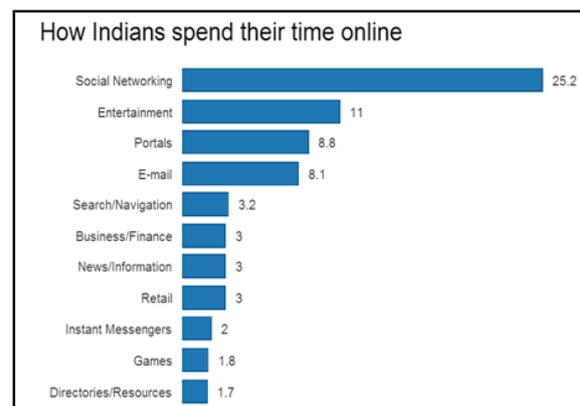


## How do Indians spend their time online: report

(*Firstpost*, April 25, 2014)

A recent report by Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) has pegged the number of internet users in the india at 137 million. According to a Goldman Sachs study, in 2013, a quarter of the Indians spending time online were engaged on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Entertainment sites come in the second, taking up 8 percent of online users' time. 'Portals' and email rank between 8 and 9 percent, rounding off the top five segments.

However, there is also general category- a little under 30 percent, which is an aggregate mix of the rest of things Indian users do when they're online.



Online shopping takes up just 3 percent of the time, while games a mere 1.8 percent. Online news and information commands only 3 percent of a user's time on the Internet.

<http://www.firstbiz.com/life/chart-indians-spend-time-online-82951.html>

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014  
(Neha Singh)

## ENVIRONMENT

### Toxic waste spill in Mahan: Essar's dereliction of duty

(Shashwati Shankar, *Green Peace*, April 22, 2014)

Essar's power plant located in Mahan, Singauli district has witnessed a major dam failure which released toxic fly ash waste into the local community's land and homes.

Fly ash which are dumped in huge open mounds and in toxic ponds are likely to displace migrants and cause large scale air, land and water pollution in the area, adversely affect the health of the people and the environment. Essar wants to build a coal mine in the adjacent forest, for the power plant.

Other major concerns are:

- Fly ash have a very bad impact on the environment
- Marshy fly ash waste seeps through the land affecting the vegetation in the area.

These problem have resulted in the failure of the dam and drowning of many houses. The authorities are acknowledging the damage of land, but not the lives lost and giving fair compensation to the people.

[http://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/Blog/Campaign\\_blogs/toxic-waste-spill-in-mahan-essars-dereliction/blog/49004/](http://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/Blog/Campaign_blogs/toxic-waste-spill-in-mahan-essars-dereliction/blog/49004/)

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014

(Neha Singh)

## AGRICULTURE

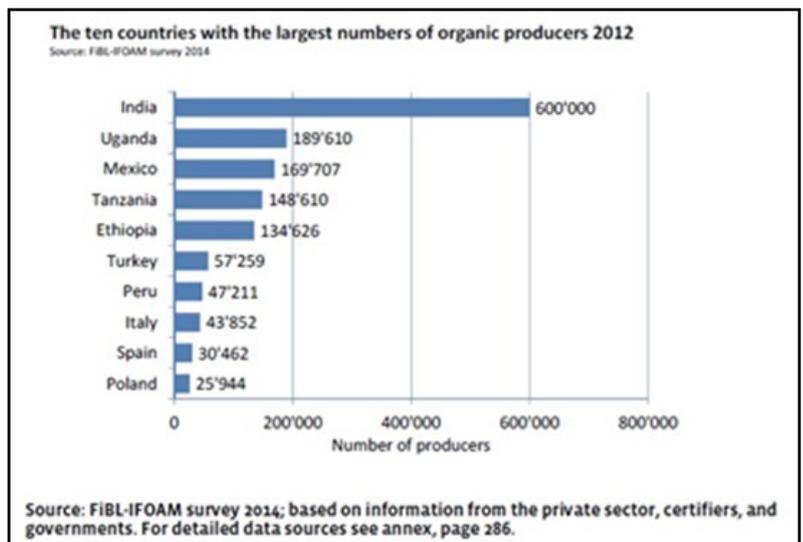
### Organic farming shrinking in India

(*im4change*)

A new report entitled: The World of Organic Agriculture: Statistics and Emerging Trends 2014 notes that while the rest of the world is witnessing a rise in area under organic farming, India is witnessing a decline. The report notes that roughly 32 percent of the total organic producers are from India

India has nearly 0.5 million hectares organic agricultural land, which is much lower as compared to China (1.9 million hectares). If organic agricultural land is added with land under wild collection, then available total organic area in India is 52 lakh hectares during 2012. Details on land use are not available for some countries with large organic agricultural areas like India, Australia and Brazil, as per the report.

“The report cautions that although in many countries from Africa and Europe organic farming land grew (as compared with 2011), such land in Asia decreased by almost 0.5 million hectares to 3.2 million hectares in 2012 thanks to a decline in such land in India. Between 2011 and 2012, India lost 5.84 lakh hectares organic agricultural land—a decline of roughly 54 percent.”



<http://www.im4change.org/news-alerts/the-state-of-organic-agriculture-in-india-24827.html>

Date Accessed: 27.04.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

## DEFENCE

### MH370: India's intelligence challenge

(Sameer Patil, *Gateway House*, March 21, 2014)

The talk about the missing Malaysian airlines being hijacked for an attack on an Indian city has necessitated an assessment of India's counter-terrorism preparedness.

Since the 2008 Mumbai attacks, a number of internal intelligence reports have mentioned the possibility of the next terror attack being from the skies. The likelihood of such an attack requires responses on two fronts:

- a) Tactical – Strengthened air defences to prevent violation of Indian air space and fend off aerial attacks; and
- b) Long term – Enhanced intelligence-sharing among the over 25 security agencies for proper analysis and dissemination of terror threat inputs, to ensure proper coordination on actionable intelligence that can foil terror attacks.

On the tactical front the Indian Air Force and Indian Navy have augmented their surveillance and defence capabilities. Security agencies have worked together to create 'no-fly zones' covering sensitive and vulnerable targets.

But the more critical aspect of intelligence-sharing lags behind. This is evident from the functioning of the Multi Agency Centre (MAC), which was created after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It has so far been unable to harness intelligence and break down the high barriers between our two premier intelligence agencies – the Intelligence Bureau and the Research & Analysis Wing. Bureaucratic turf battles and recalcitrant state governments have so far defeated its worthy initiative and entrenched vested interests. On many occasions, this has seriously impaired India's counter terrorism efforts and lost us critical leads on potential terror attacks.

Addressing the challenge of intelligence-gathering, improvement of police capabilities and ensuring better coordination between central and state government agencies, requires our political leaders to take a view independent of the vested interests. The next government must treat this as a priority and despite its difficulty, upset the status quo.

<http://www.gatewayhouse.in/mh370-indias-intelligence-challenge/>

Date Accessed: 25.04.2014

(Gayatri Verma)

## REGIONAL

### Seba mulls CBSE module for Assam

(Wasim Rahman, *The Telegraph*, April 21, 2014)

Continuing with the ongoing reforms in secondary education, the Board of Secondary Education in Assam proposes to base High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) exams on 30 per cent of marks scored in half-yearly examinations. According to the proposal which also includes High Madarassa exams another 40 per cent will be derived from four formative assessment tests conducted during the academic year.

Unlike the CBSE, the HSLC net results are currently based entirely on the final board exams. According to sources, the current efforts are to align the state secondary education and evaluation system with the CBSE model. Keeping this in mind, the secondary board of Assam has already adopted the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) books.

After having discussed the proposal in a meeting in Guwahati, the board will submit the proposals to the government for approval following which Seba would issue fresh notifications on the basis of the proposals made in the meeting,

[http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140422/jsp/frontpage/story\\_18265347.jsp#.UIi41PmSyaJ](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140422/jsp/frontpage/story_18265347.jsp#.UIi41PmSyaJ)

Date Accessed: 24.04.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

### Only 4% EWS parents in Delhi aware of reservation under RTE Act: Study

(Shikha Sharma, *Indian Express*, April 26, 2014)

A report on the Right to Education Act by Indus Action — an NGO working exclusively towards implementation of Section 12(1)(C) clause of the RTE Act; which mandates that private unaided schools reserve 25 per cent of their seats in entry-level classes for EWS students and those from disadvantaged groups — observed that only four per cent of parents from economically weaker sections (EWS) are aware about 25 per cent seat reservation in Delhi's private schools and that only half, of those aware, have managed to navigate through bureaucratic application barriers.

Tarun Cherukuri, founder, Indus Action, noted that “despite the best efforts to spread awareness, eligible families seem to have little knowledge about the policy. Section 12(1)(c) of RTE Act has the potential to put roughly 10 million children across India on a different path in the next five years, making it the single largest opportunity seat scheme in the world. But we need a better state-wide implementation plan for that to happen,”

The report states that despite low awareness the eligible families were adequately equipped to apply. Yet, families chose not to apply; high fees being a major concern discouraging them from applying to private schools.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/only-4-ews-parents-aware-of-reservation-under-rte-act-study/>

Date Accessed: 28.04.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

### Kerala speeds up ‘e-office’ plan

(Saritha S Balan, *The New Indian Express*, April 27, 2014)

At a time when thousands of files have piled up in the Kerala Government Secretariat, the government is speeding up its ‘e-office’ plan, to bring in more efficiency, speed and transparency in its operations. ‘e-office’ plan is one of

the components of e-governance. The officials in the Government Secretariat, above the rank of Joint Secretary, are being trained to become more tech-savvy to adapt to the new era's governance method.

“The officials will be provided laptops, data cards and Elevated Pedestrian Network (EPN) connectivity. The main aim is to ensure speedy decision making. Equipped with the gadgets, the officials will be able to check files and take action even when they are not present in the office.” The pilot project would be implemented in the Finance Department in May while 17 other departments would move to e-office mode by June.

Kerala is the fourth state to be ‘converted’ to the e-office mode after Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir. It was also implemented in the Central Secretariat. Though the Finance Department officials planned to visit Maharashtra to learn about the e-office implementation they had to drop it as Lok Sabha elections were announced.

The first phase of the project had already begun in certain sections of the Finance Department. But sources said that hurdles were there as some employees had not yet furnished sufficient details for creating e-mail IDs and Digital Signature Certificate, a method using encryption techniques and a public/private key to verify the authenticity of a person or transaction. “The e-office project, to be implemented at a cost of around Rs 5 crore, was announced by the government as a Cabinet decision in August 2013.”

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/Govt-Speeds-up-e-office-Plan/2014/04/27/article2191647.ece>

Date Accessed: 28.04.2014

(Anjana John)

## **Look East Policy conclave recommends ‘way forward’ for Look South Aspect**

(Staff Reporter, *Meghalaya Times*, April 21, 2014)

“Local tour operators from the northeastern region, individuals and organizations active at policy-making and operational levels in the field of trade, industry, transport, tourism, hospitality and especially Bangladesh Foundation for Tourism Development” participated in a conclave organized by Asian Confluence “India’s Look East Policy: Strengthening the Look South Aspect: Exploring win-win synergies through Indo - Bangladesh Border Trade and Tourism”.

Various topics related to India’s Look East Policy were discussed and the group “emphasized on convenient VISA processing System, setting up non-government body to make a platform for North East tourism, linking up and creating North East circuit and connecting to South East Asia, making Shillong a hub for tourism and trade, urgent need to restructure relation between India and Bangladesh, creating win-win situations through trade in tourism – need of sufficient infrastructure to facilitate trade, facilitation at the borders, transport connectivity between the two countries, developing highways – developing bus services from Dhaka to North East, issue of money exchange, positive image building of Bangladesh amongst Indians, historical tourism, medical tourism, Mukti Youdha – develop a memory trail, cultural tourism, creating Adivasi Circuit between India and Bangladesh, developing our water-base as tourism potential and rural tourism, facilitating informal trade, creating platform for research in tourism, trade, history of the region – exchange programmes between private universities in Meghalaya and Bangladesh.”

To synergize these issues the roundtable also proposed “way forward” which includes linking academician, role of media in North East (NE) and Bangladesh, creating tour packages, pushing for consular services, linking policy makers, bring all NE actors and planning a calendar of events to enable people to people contact

<http://meghalayatimes.info/index.php/front-page/24885-look-east-policy-conclave-recommends-way-forward-for-look-south-aspect>

Date Accessed: 26.04.2014

(Junty Sharma Pathak)

## **PDS doesn't reach 20 lakh people in the valley**

**(Mudasir Yaqoob, *Greater Kashmir*, Saturday 26, 2014)**

Jammu and Kashmir government has not been able to provide ration to around twenty lakh people in Valley as the foodgrains to Valley under Public Distribution System continue to be supplied as per the 2000 population census. At a time when government is gloating over widening the reach of PDS, 40000 families in Valley are without ration cards, forcing them to buy rice in private at exorbitant rates.

Sources suggest that people in Leh and Kargil are getting three lakh quintals rice for a month which is much lesser than what is really required. "The main reason for increasing demand of ration was that the supply received by the state government from government of India is "grossly inadequate. State government has failed to impress the federal government to allocate supply as per current population need," said sources. "The supply is being received as per the 2000 census on the national norms. It has created difficulties for the government to distribute the ration at the notified scale in all areas," they added.

Sources said that around 9 lakh ration cards have been issued to consumers while in unofficial figure suggests that more 40000 ration cards are in demand. In an effort to provide an interim relief, centre allocated state to identify poorest among poors under 'Uncovered BPL'. "Around 95000 people were identified who are being supplied rice and wheat on BPL rates. The scheme ends in April. However, Government of India (GoI) has accorded sanction for the scheme to extent it further for the months of May and June 2014," informed sources.

Various aggrieved families who applied for ration cards could not get it, despite being J&K Service Guarantee Act in force. "The issuance of ration card under scheme is not possible as fresh ration cards cannot be issued till GoI adopts new census of population. Under the Act, only name change and duplicate ration cards, in case of loss, can be done within stipulated time under the act," said sources.

<http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2014/Apr/27/pds-doesn-t-reach-20-lakh-people-in-valley-46.asp>

Date Accessed: 28.04.2014

(Deepti Somani)

## INDIA IN THE WORLD

### Govt prepares to battle US pressure on patents

(Nayanima Basu, *Business Standard*, April 22, 2014)

This article highlights the steps being taken by the Indian government in the event the US government imposes sanctions against Indian companies on the ground of a lax intellectual property rights (IPR) regime.

India, it was decided, might take the US to the World Trade Organization (WTO) if such unwarranted action was taken, as India is WTO-compliant on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights. The government is also compiling cases where the US had breached IPR laws. India's ambassador to the US, S Jaishankar, is also discussing the issue with the US government.

The office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) is expected to issue what is termed a "Special 301" report this month-end or early next month. This is an annual survey in which the USTR is supposed to identify countries which do not provide "adequate and effective" IPR protection or "fair and equitable market access to United States persons that rely upon IPR".

There is apprehension that the USTR might put India on the Priority Foreign Country list for IPR which names countries judged to have inadequate intellectual property laws or deny fair and equitable market access to US entities relying on IPR protection.

Since US President Barack Obama's 2010 India visit, American firms, especially a certain segment of the US pharmaceutical industry, have become extremely vocal about Indian policies on domestic content requirements and IPR. Policy circles believe the US is doing these to protect the interest of a handful of pharmaceutical companies, which command influence in policy making circles there. These include Pfizer, Bayer and Swiss pharma major Novartis.

[http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/govt-prepares-to-battle-us-pressure-on-patents-114042101118\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/govt-prepares-to-battle-us-pressure-on-patents-114042101118_1.html)

Date Accessed: 22.4.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

### Indian envoy says no post poll change in China policy

(Saibal Dasgupta, *The Times of India*, April 25, 2014)

Putting to rest speculations surrounding India's stance on foreign policy between India and China, Indian ambassador in Beijing Ashok Kantha made an important statement to assure China that there will be no change in India's policy towards the country after the formation of a new government. India and China are celebrating 2014 as the Year of Friendly Exchanges, which will see wide ranging interactions at different levels including culture, business and defence.

The Indian embassy has also promised to give visas for Chinese tourists and business travellers in two working days. The move comes after repeated complaints from Chinese officials and business houses about delays in processing visas of Chinese citizens. Also, India and China will hold a joint military exercise. The Indian Embassy is also organizing a series of cultural events under the theme 'Glimpses of India' events across 12 Chinese cities. An effort will also be made to connect with Chinese youth by holding lectures and cultural events in universities.

"Whichever government comes to power in India, we will continue attach great degree of importance to building friendly ties with China. I do not see any change in direction of our policy of seeking close engagement and friendship with China," Kantha stated.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/lok-sabha-elections-2014/news/Indian-envoy-sees-no-post-poll-change-in-China-policy/articleshow/34172140.cms>

Date Accessed: 24.04.2014

(Mahima Malik)

## EAST AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

### Myanmar: UNICEF warns children of Kachin face growing threats

(UN News Centre, April 22, 2014)

This article highlights the findings of the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) which points to the threat to children in Myanmar. Recent fighting between Government forces and Kachin rebels in Myanmar, and the resulting displacement of thousands of people, has significantly increased the risks to young people.

Children are vulnerable to:

1. possible recruitment
2. limited access to basic services
3. threat of landmines
4. health risks, due to reduced access to safe, reliable water and sanitation facilities

An estimated 1,000 children are among those forced to leave their temporary homes amid the fighting between the Myanmar National Army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in areas of southern Kachin state, UNICEF noted in a news release. In addition, Kachin and northern Shan are already among the most heavily mined areas in Myanmar, the agency noted. Landmines left behind or placed intentionally continue to cause harm to vulnerable populations, including children, as well as hamper humanitarian aid delivery.

UNICEF is working with other UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations to help threatened children and their families. While support is being mobilised, the agency stressed that improved access to affected populations, particularly children, is needed.

More than 75,000 people have been displaced since fighting between Government forces and Kachin rebels began almost two years ago. For many of those displaced in the latest hostilities, it is the second or third time that they have been uprooted in the past year.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47626&Cr=myanmar&Cr1=#.U1dRavmSyVI>

Date Accessed: 23.4.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

### India calls for end to UN resolution on Myanmar human rights

(Zee News, April 26, 2014)

In the backdrop of several "significant" political and economic reforms initiated in Myanmar over the last few years towards greater democratisation, India has called for the discontinuation of a UN General Assembly resolution on the human rights situation in the Southeast Asian country.

Indian Ambassador to the UN, Asoke Mukherji, said India would continue to support the steps taken by the Myanmar government towards reform and reconciliation, with reference to pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, release of political prisoners, holding of peace talks with the ethnic groups, including the Kachins and proposal for signing of a nationwide ceasefire accord soon. "These are positive steps, especially given that elections are due to take place next year. We take note of the recently concluded census operation and hope that the data generated would help in formulating policies which would be beneficial for the holistic growth of the country".

In this regard, he said, "We believe that time has come for member states to now agree to the discontinuation of the resolution on human rights situation in Myanmar. This would convey the international community's strong support and encouragement for the reform measures that are already underway in Myanmar". India's proposal was supported by Vietnam.

As per the resolution on the human rights situation in Myanmar approved in November 2011, the UNGA expressed grave concern about violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Myanmar, while recognising the government's commitment to implementing reforms. During deliberations last year in the UNGA's Third Committee, which deals with social, humanitarian and cultural issues, India had stated that the resolution should be discontinued.

According to the resolution, the General Assembly would welcome the Myanmar government's stated commitment to continue on the path of political and economic reform, democratisation and national reconciliation, as well as the promotion and protection of human rights.

India has extended grants-in-aid of about 670 million dollars for projects in the fields of human resource development, infrastructure, agriculture, IT, health and industrial training in Myanmar. Progress is also being made on various connectivity projects underway in Myanmar including the Kaladan Multimodal Transit-Transport Project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Tamu-Kalawa-Kalemyo Road and Rhi-Tiddim Road.

[http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/india-calls-for-end-to-un-resolution-on-myanmar-human-rights\\_927462.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/india-calls-for-end-to-un-resolution-on-myanmar-human-rights_927462.html)

Date Accessed: 28.04.2014

(Deepthi Somani)

## AMERICAS

### Growing up behind bars: 1,500 children being raised by parents in Bolivian jails

(Sara Shahriari, *The Guardian*, April 20, 2014)

Protection of children living in prisons with their families in Bolivia has emerged as a major issue in the country. With 1500 children living behind bars, Bolivia faces the challenge of ensuring a safe environment for these children. According to inmates, the outside world also does not ensure a safe and secure environment for their children. Neither can they bank upon relatives and extended families as most of them are poor and safety of their children may remain an issue still.

In San Pedro- a prison in Bolivia- cells are rented out to prisoners, who can enter and leave them at will. It also has a council elected by the prisoners that governs almost all aspects of life of the inmates. For those families who cannot afford to live outside the prison is the best alternative with no additional charges for like electricity and water. Other benefits like food for children under six are also encouraging for prisoners, who choose to live with their families in prison.

According to national law, children are not allowed to live in prison after they turn six. However, many continue to live in San Pedro as parents are reluctant to leave them.

However, despite offering excellent facilities to inmates, incidents of violence are not uncommon in San Pedro. There have been cases of rape and child deaths due to inmate fights in San Pedro last year. Given the current situation, there have been renewed efforts to make children aged 11 and above leave prison premises. The presence of children in Bolivia prisons has sparked off criticism from various international organisations including the United Nations.

According to Lida Rodriguez of Bolivia's human rights office although efforts would continue to remove children, it remains unclear as to how safer lives and better opportunities will be assured to these children.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/20/growing-behind-bars-children-parents-bolivian-jails>

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(Pallavi Ghosh)

## BOOKS

### The Endless Crisis

by John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney

The book traces the origins of the 2009 crisis, termed as the “Great Stagnation” by Foster and McChesney, and lays out its implication for the current times. The authors point out that capitalist economies dominated by MNCs and financial corporations have led to “stagnation with occasional escapes” instead of “growth with occasional recessions”; the conventional stance that is usually adopted towards the capitalist economies of today. According to the authors, when a handful of large firms dominate one or several industries, it leads to over abundance of capital in these sectors and diminishes investment avenues-thus resulting in economic stagnation. In the absence of “powerful stimuli to investment such as historic innovations like the automobile or major government spending”, modern capitalist economies have increasingly relied on the financial sector to realize profits. However this alternative has only proven to be a temporary respite for investors from stagnation, as the financial sector is characterized by instability. Inquiries of the book can therefore be taken up as an “incentive to action”.

<http://monthlyreview.org/press/books/cl3133/>

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(Karishma Mutreja)

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