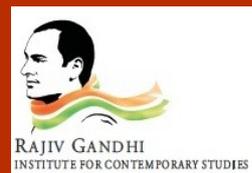


Issue
2.40

RGICS POLICY WATCH



VOL. II ISSUE - 40

2nd June, 2014

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

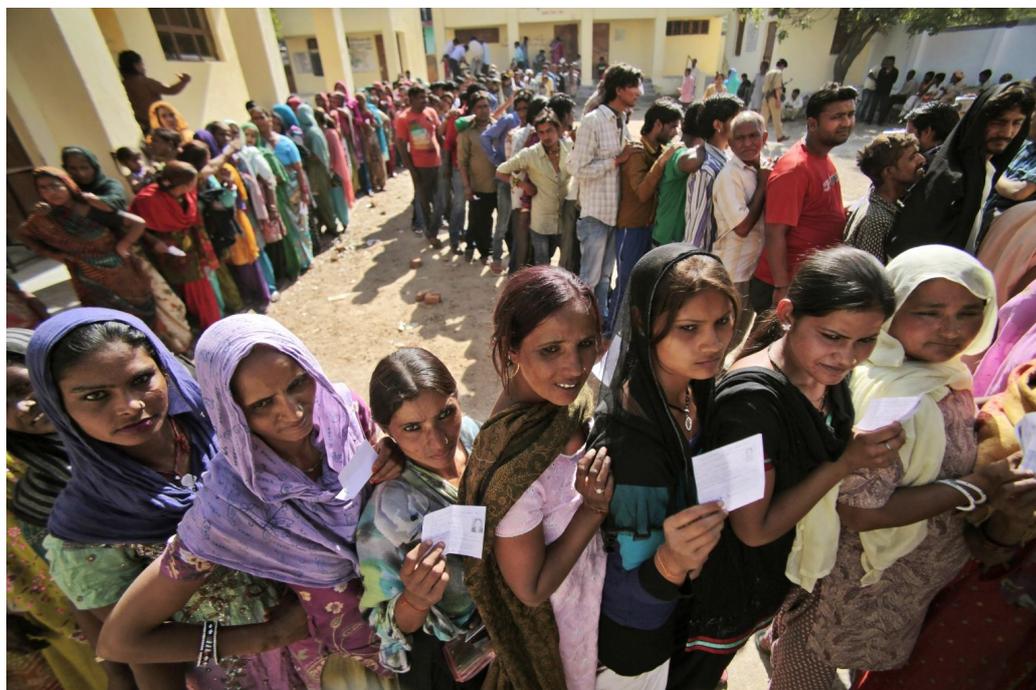
- Legislative brief on National Identification authority India Act, 2010
- Background Paper on Protection of Street Vendors

INSIDE THE ISSUE

- Policy Priority of the New Government: 10 Point Agenda
- Biggest ever loan waiver in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh for farmers and SHGs
- Government to prioritise three critical rail links to evacuate coastal areas
- Farm department unveils action plan to make

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.

Did BJP secure a sweeping mandate in the 2014 Elections?



Source : <http://www.post-gazette.com/image/2014/04/11/ca0.0.1536.1024/indiaElections-int.jpg>

Compiled by RGICS

Jawahar Bhawan, New Delhi

Issue Coordinator : Ms. Junty Sharma Pathak

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COVER STORY: Did BJP secure a sweeping mandate in the 2014 elections?

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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

Did BJP secure a sweeping mandate in the 2014 Elections?

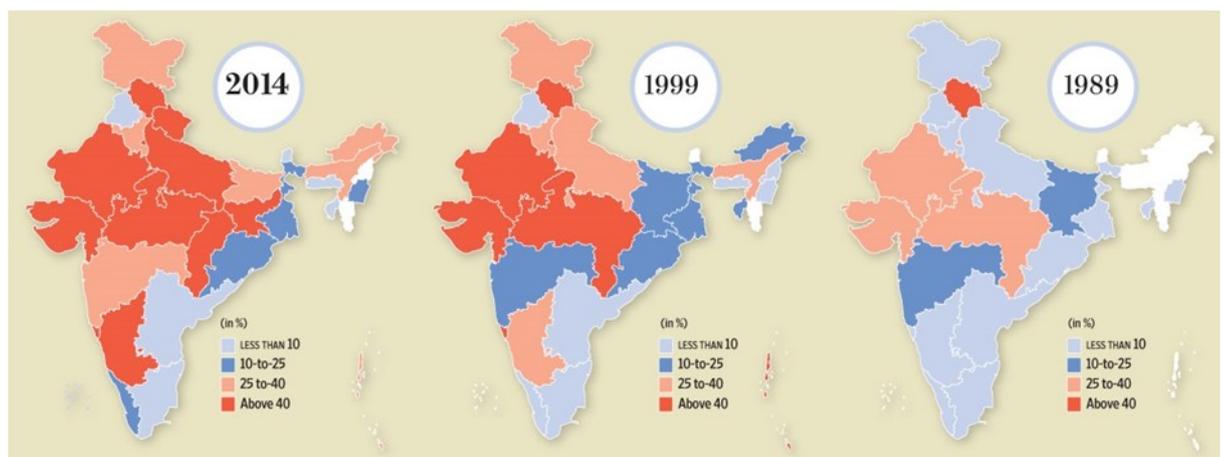
Introduction

In the post poll analysis of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, there is a collective perception that *prima facie*, the BJP received a sweeping mandate; however, a deeper analysis of the vote share and voting patterns reveals a different picture which primarily dents this common perception. This article looks at the 2014 Lok Sabha elections from three perspectives namely: bi-decadal vote share analysis, high voter turnout and whether corruption played the dominant factor in anti-incumbency.

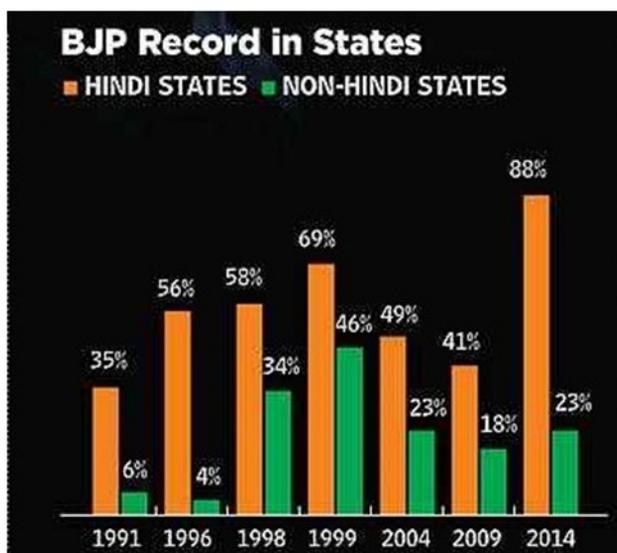
Established in 1980 and concentrated mainly in the ‘hindi’ heartland, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) has now spread its wing across most parts of India. The 2014 Lok Sabha elections marked a sharp eastward surge for the party, and also saw it making slight gains in southern India, where it has been historically weak. The following maps trace the change in vote share of BJP in each state over two decades.

Analysis of vote share

BJP Vote Share



Source: <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/9jriyXoJR4E0I4GQRtQBMK/Key-takeaways-from-the-2014-Lok-Sabha-election-results.html>



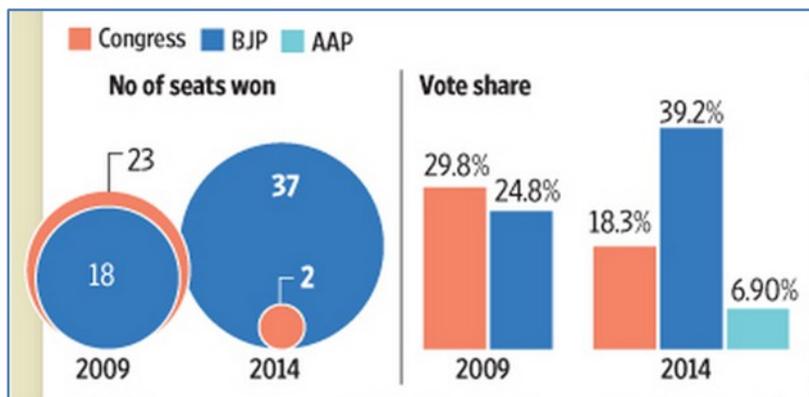
Praveen Chakravarty notes that “in the 1999 elections, when the BJP had a blanket policy of alliances, tying up with regional parties such as TDP [Telugu Desam Party] in Andhra Pradesh, the AIADMK [All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] in Tamil Nadu and the BJD [Biju Janata Dal] in Orissa, the party won 46% of its total seats in ‘non-hindi’ states and 69% from the ‘hindi’ states, eventually forming the government.” In the 2014 election, the BJP without any regional alliance (barring Andhra Pradesh) won 23% of its seats in ‘non-hindi’ states and 88% in ‘hindi’ states.

It is evident from the adjacent graph that the BJP's sweeping mandate is concentrated largely in the ‘hindi’ states where it secured 88% of its total seats; while recording only 23% seats in the ‘non-hindi’ states. Interestingly, the 1999 elections reveal a more national distribution of NDA support.

Source: <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/The-Pass-percentage/290753>

Relationship between Urban Seats and Vote share

Urban Vote share



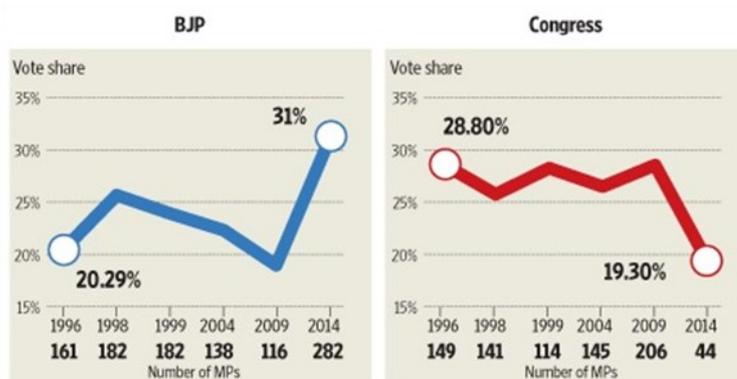
Source: Election Commission of India

Of the 543 constituencies, 57 have been classified as ‘urban’. An interesting takeaway in the 2014 elections are that the seats won by BJP in 2014 in urban constituencies is double the number of seats it won in 2009 even though its voteshare has marginally increased by 14.4%. The Congress, however, with a loss of 11.5% voteshare over the last two lok sabha elections; came down from 21 seats in 2009 to 2 seats.

The above data shows that although an increase/decrease in voteshare has been marginal for both the parties, there has been a sharp increase/decline in the number of seats won by the respective parties.

Change in Vote Share

Vote Share of BJP and Congress



Source: Election Commission of India

In 2014, the BJP’s national vote share rose by 12.2% points over 2009 to reach an all time high of 31%. However, BJP with 18.8% vote share in 2009 managed to secure 116 seats whereas the Congress with 19.3% vote share in 2014 secured only 44 seats.

In 2014, BJP’s gain (12.2%) is higher than Congress’s loss (9%) in vote share.

The difference in the vote share of BJP in 2014 (31%) and Congress in 2009 (28.5%) is only 2.5% points, but the number of

extra seats the BJP won in 2014 is disproportionately higher, indicating that the vote-share-to-seat-conversion ratio has been higher for the BJP in 2014 than it was for the Congress in 2009. This disproportionate change in the vote-share-to-seat-conversion can be explained by high voter turnout, among other factors.

Increase in voter turnout

At 66.4%, the 2014 elections recorded the highest voter turnout in a national election. The turnout in 2014 was 8 % points higher than 2009.

Sanjay Kumar and Shreyas Sardesai note that there is a direct link between the success rate of the NDA and the increased turnout at the constituency level. The following table shows the breakup of the aforementioned relationship between increased turnout and NDA success rate.

In the 2014 elections, 70 constituencies across India recorded a sharp percentage increase of 15% and above voter turnout since 2009. Of these 67 seats were won by NDA i.e. 95.7%.

SUCCESS RATE AND RISE IN TURNOUT			
Turnout increase since 2009	Number of seats	Seats won by NDA	% of total seats won
15% points and above	70	67	95.7%
10-14.99% points	145	125	86.2%
0.1-9.99% points	267	123	46.1%
No change/decline in turnout	61	21	34.4%

Similarly, of the 145 constituencies which recorded a marginal increase of 10-14.99%, NDA won 125 seats. Out of the 267 constituencies where the increase in voter turnout was not so significant i.e. between 0.1 and 9.99%; NDA only secured only 46.1% of the total seats. However in constituencies where the voter turnout has been constant or has declined; NDA only won 34.4% of the total seats.

The data shows that in the 2014 elections, an increase in voter turnout was directly proportional to NDAs success.

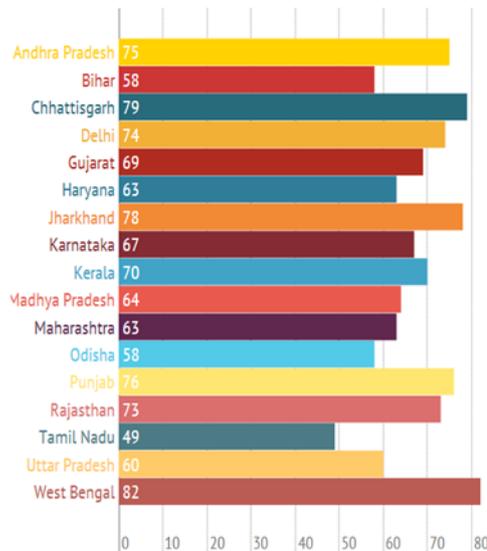
For instance, Goa saw an increase of 21.74% in its voter turnout. In 2009, both Congress and BJP secured 1 seat each in the two constituencies of Goa but in 2014, BJP won both the seats.

Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-importance-of-high-urnout/article6050326.ece?ref=relatedNews>

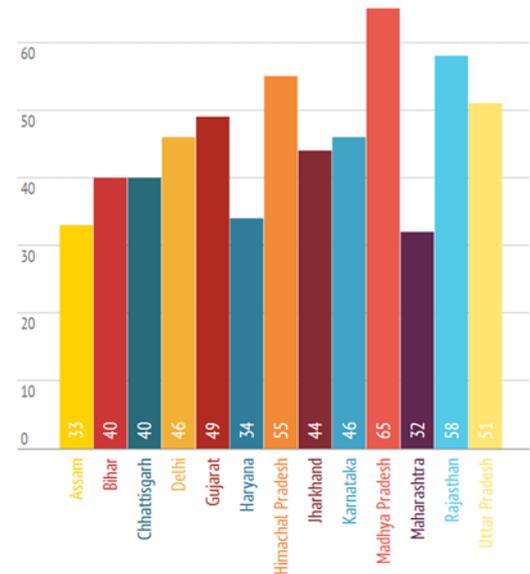
Higher Turnout in Youth Vote

An important trend observed in the 2014 general elections was the overall increase in the participation of first-time voters (18-22 years) and other young voters (23-25 years). Sanjay Kumar observes that compared to the national turnout of 66.4%, the turnout among the first time voters and other young voters is 1.8% points higher and stands at 68%. This is significant because the turnout among young voters has always been lower compared to the national average. The states that recorded the biggest shift among the first time voters in favour of BJP were Madhya Pradesh followed by Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan.

Turnout among first time voters (18-22yrs)



Vote share of BJP amongst first time voters (18-22yrs)



Source: Election Commission of India

In Madhya Pradesh where the average turnout was around 62%, BJP secured a 54 % vote share, which is the highest ever by any party in the state. In this, the recorded turnout among the first time voters in the state was around 64% of which roughly 65% voted in favour of the BJP.

In Uttar Pradesh, which saw a 58 % voter turnout, 60 % were first time voters of which 51 % voted in favour of BJP. Similarly in Jharkhand and Rajasthan of the 78% and 73% first time voters respectively, 44% and 58% voters favoured BJP.

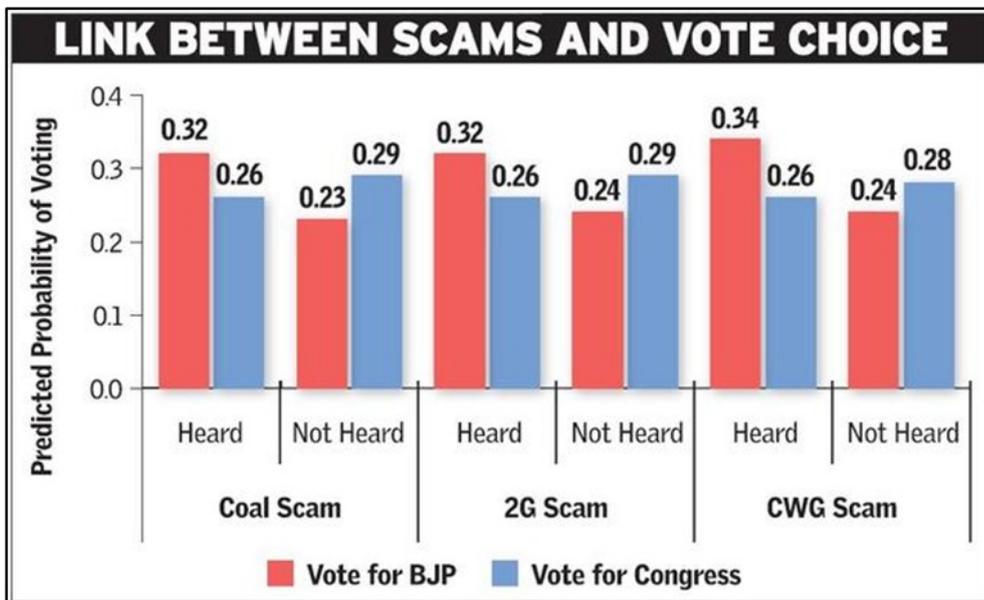
However in a state like Maharashtra where the BJP's performance has been moderate, of the 63% first time voters, only 32% favoured BJP. On the other hand in West Bengal, which has recorded the highest turnout among first time voters at 82%, at par with the average turnout in the state, BJP has only secured 16.8% of the total voteshare.

In some states like Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Punjab and Rajasthan the turnout among first-time voters was much higher than the average turnout, while in others it was more or less at par. Sanjay Kumar observes that the 2014 elections saw a much higher participation of first-time voters as compared to previous elections however these voters do not seem to have voted for the BJP in a big way, nevertheless even a marginal shift in the first time voters preferences for BJP played a significant role in securing a strong mandate.

Did Corruption Influence Voter Choice?

There has been an overwhelming impression that UPA performed poorly in the 2014 elections owing to an anti-incumbency wave coupled with corruption charges (coal allocation, 2G and CWG scam) at the highest level.

An analysis by Pradeep Chhibber, Harsh Shah and Rahul Verma reveals that these massive scams have no bearing on voter choice. The analysts attribute two reasons on why the scams do not determine electoral outcomes in the country: “firstly, a large proportion of the electorate has never heard of the corruption scams that occupy newspaper headlines and prime-time television space and secondly, there was no statistically significant influence of the knowledge of scams on the respondent’s preference for the two parties.”



A pre-poll survey conducted by Lokniti-CSDS involving more than 18,000 respondents reveals two interesting aspects:

- Awareness among the general public on scams such as 2G and coalgate was quite low; only 50% of the respondents claimed of having heard of the coal scam, 40% about the 2G scam and only 33.4% had knowledge of other scams. Further, awareness of all of these scams was much lower among women, the poor and respondents residing in rural areas.
- Likelihood of a voter preferring the Congress remained almost the same whether or not he/she had heard of the party's involvement in scams. Those who had heard of the scams were a little more likely to vote for the BJP but the difference in the probability of a voter voting for the BJP after hearing about the scams is no more than 10 % (and that too only for the CWG scam) and does not pass the threshold of statistical significance. Thus, the difference in the probability of a voter voting for the BJP after hearing of a scam and one opting for the BJP without having any knowledge of a scam is zero.

The above data contradicts the popular belief that massive corruption was responsible for Congress' poor performance. Based on the survey Chhibber, Shah and Verma argue that voters are more concerned with local-level corruption they encounter on an everyday basis and since most of these cases are directly linked to state officials and are not to any particular party; national level corruption is not an issue on which voters discriminate while exercising their franchise.

Conclusion

In light of the above parameters the collective perception that BJP recorded a national sweep does not hold true when one analyses the voting patterns. The analysis suggests that BJP's vote share is largely concentrated in the 'hindi' heartland which amounts to 88% of the total seats won by the party. With a marginal difference of 2.5% points in the vote share of BJP in 2014 and Congress in 2009, the number of seats secured by the BJP in 2014 is disproportionately higher, indicating that the vote-share-to-seat-conversion ratio has been higher for the BJP in 2014 than it was for the Congress in 2009. This disproportionate change can be explained by high voter turnout, among other factors.

Constituencies which have recorded a higher increase in voter turnout have shown a clear preference for NDA. Moreover, the 2014 elections also recorded the highest turnout of young voters. Although the voting preference among the first-time voters was not uniform across the country, there was a clear preference for the BJP among the first-time voters in the 'hindi' heartland.

In urban constituencies, more than BJP preference, it was the strong anti-incumbency wave that swayed in favour of the BJP. Lastly, as opposed to popular belief, corruption at the highest level was not the decisive factor in the anti-incumbency wave.

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Policy Priority of the New Government: 10 Point Agenda

(Business Standards, May 30, 2014)

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has outlined a 10-point vision for the council of ministers to follow which will give a glimpse into the policy priorities. The main policy priorities of the government include energizing the economy, kick-starting infrastructure projects and reviving confidence in the bureaucracy.

On these lines ministers have been asked to prepare a 100-day agenda, listing projects and programmes that could be initiated in the short term. PM has signaled reforms in both investments as well as infrastructure areas. Also the government will look into increasing the FDI cap in defense sector beyond 26%.

Following are the 10 point agenda given by government to the ministries

- 1) Reforms in infrastructure and investment areas
- 2) Addressing concerns relating to the economy
- 3) Promoting e-auction to push transparency
- 4) Reviving confidence in bureaucracy
- 5) Focusing on innovative ideas in the government and work freedom for officials
- 6) Bringing a people-oriented system in government machinery
- 7) Health, water, education, roads, energy priority areas
- 8) Sorting inter-ministerial issues through efficient system
- 9) Bringing stability and sustainability in govt. policy
- 10) Executing policies in a time-bound manner

http://www.business-standard.com/article/politics/energising-economy-figures-on-modi-s-10-point-agenda-114052900618_1.html

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Neha Singh)

Biggest ever loan waiving in Telengana and Andhra Pradesh for farmers and SHGs

(DNA, May 30, 2014)

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) have promised to waive off farm loans after coming into power. Banks estimate that the loan waiver amount for the two states will be to the tune of Rs 1,37,172 crore perhaps the biggest ever in India.

TDP returned to power in Andhra after a gap of 10 years on the promise of waiving loans worth 87,612 crore taken by farmers and self-help groups. TRS too had promised to waive farmers' loans up to Rs 49,650 crore. The loans make up 29.09 % of the net bank credit of the states' banks against the RBI norm of 18%. However, both the state governments are likely to be bankrupt post the bifurcation, and will have to turn to the NDA government at the Centre.

CMD of Andhra Bank and president of the State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) said that in view of the high expectations raised during elections grameen banks, cooperatives and urban banks are not able to collect a single rupee of the huge farm loan burden. He also warned that without proper guidelines, the entire exercise of waiving off loans would be impossible and futile. Banks are however pleased as the state governments will fully reimburse the banks, helping them to bring down their non-performing assets (NPAs). As of January 1, 2014, the percentage of NPAs to total loans outstanding under agriculture, MSE and SHG lending were 5.08 per cent, 5.36 per cent and 3.44 per cent, respectively.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-will-nda-bail-out-andhra-pradesh-telangana-on-loan-waiver-burden-1992240>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Neha Singh)

Government to prioritise three critical rail links to evacuate coal

(Exim News Service, May 28, 2014)

The Union government plans for evacuation of 300 million tonnes (mt) of additional coal for the implementation of three critical rail corridors which are under different phases of development. Earlier, Coal India Ltd (CIL) had expressed its inability to tap the potential for supplying 300 mt of additional coal due to the absence of critical rail links for lifting coal.

The three rail corridors are

- Tori-Shivpuri-Kathotia in North Karanpura, Jharkhand
- Bhupdeopur-Korichhaapar to Mand Raigadh mines in Chhattisgarh
- Barpali-Jharsuguda in IB Valley, Odisha

The Ministry of Coal also plans rationalise procedures for environment and forest clearance adopting online processing of applications. The rationalizing will be done since the gap between demand and supply was continuously widening and was likely to touch 185 mt by 2016-17.

In addition, the government would also accept cluster approach for environmental clearances to augment the production of coal from a group of mines, as per the sources.

<http://www.eximin.net/NewsDetails.aspx?name=75899>

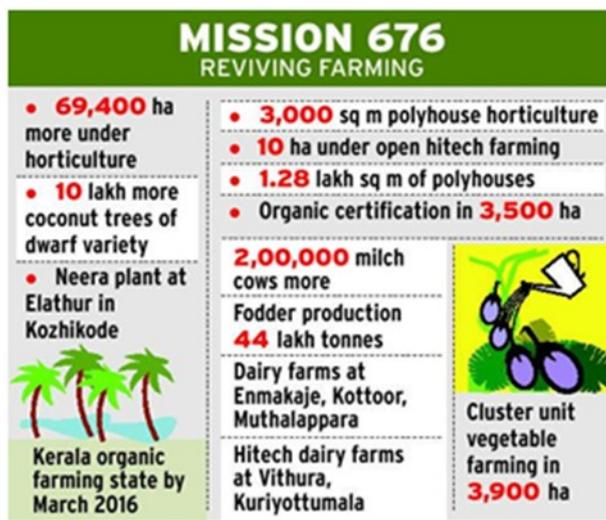
Date Accessed: 30.5.2014

(Shruti Issar)

Farm department unveils action plan to make

(The Hindu, May 29, 2014)

The Department of Agriculture, Kerala has unveiled an action plan to achieve self-reliance in vegetables and milk and reviving coconut farming in Kerala by 2016. The plan, to be taken under the government's Mission 676, seeks to bring an additional 69,400 hectares under horticulture to achieve a production target of 8.69 lakh tonnes by 2015-16.



Agriculture Minister K.P. Mohanan and senior officials said "10 lakh coconut trees of the dwarf variety would be planted across the State by February 2016 under a flagship programme to revive the coconut sector and address the shortage of tree climbers...the State Horticulture Mission will take up a project to set up 1,28,000 sq m of polyhouses and introduce organic certification in 3,500 hectares."

"As many as 2,00,000 milch cows will be added to the cattle population while the annual production of fodder will reach 44 lakh tonnes. Three new dairy farms are to be set up at Enmakaje, Kottoor and Muthalappara in Kasaragod district." The schemes are aimed at making Kerala an organic farming state by 2016.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/farm-department-unveils-action-plan-for-mission-676/>

[article6057688.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/farm-department-unveils-action-plan-for-mission-676/)

Date Accessed: 29.05.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

Govt. initiates exercise to raise FDI in defence sector to 100%

(*Business Standard*, May 30, 2014)

This article highlights the government's proposal to raise foreign direct investment (FDI) in the defense sector to 100 per cent through the approval route, aiming at giving a boost to manufacturing activities.

A 15-page Cabinet note was circulated on May 29. Accordingly, portfolio investors, including foreign institutional investors, would be permitted to invest only up to 49 per cent. Additionally, a foreign company would be able to take over a domestic entity, if it brought state-of-the-art technology. Sources said allowing FDI in the sector "would help reduce the import bill for defense equipment, help boost manufacturing and create jobs."

India opened the defense equipment sector to the private sector in May 2001, but restricted foreign participation to 26 per cent in this capital-intensive and sensitive sector. In May 2010, the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion had issued a discussion paper suggesting an increase in the FDI cap for the sector.

India is one of the largest defense importers and ranks among the top 10 in the world in military expenditure.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/govt-initiates-exercise-to-raise-fdi-in-defence-sector-to-100-114053000043_1.html

Date Accessed: 30.5.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

Indian companies more sensitive to Forex fluctuations than before: India Ratings

(Joel Rebello, *Live Mint*, May 15, 2014)

A New study by India Ratings and Research Pvt. Ltd revealed that the India's top 500 companies listed on BSE are more sensitive to foreign exchange fluctuations now than they were a few years ago. The agency attributes this to rising level of dollarization of the income statements and balance sheets since 2007.

According to the report Foreign currency (FC) revenue as a proportion of total revenue was 20.1% in fiscal 2013 versus 17.1% in fiscal 2007 and FC expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure was 41.8% in fiscal 2013 up from 38.6% in 2007. These facts imply that Indian companies have more forex outflows than inflows, reflecting the country's trading bias towards imports. As a result, the foreign currency deficit has increased at a compounded rate of 17.8% since 2007 to Rs.6.35 trillion in 2012-13 from Rs.2.38 trillion in 2006-07.

The agency predicts that these foreign currency spenders will suffer operating margin deterioration of 1.3% in operating revenue for every 1% depreciation in the rupee against the dollar. Consumer durables is most negatively sensitive to a 1% depreciation in the rupee, in the range of 1.2% to 2%, mainly because these companies spend foreign exchange on importing electrical components, according to the agency. Other sectors like fertilizers, chemicals and automotive suppliers saw operating revenues impacted by 0.5% to 1.4% in 2012-13 due to a 1% depreciation in the rupee. But slightly less than half of the BSE 500 companies, mainly from the information technology (IT) and pharmaceutical sectors, are net foreign currency earners.

<http://www.livemint.com/Money/9VCn117f3UgnHeVyO3mDWN/Indian-companies-more-sensitive-to-forex-fluctuations-than-b.html>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Neha Singh)

DEVELOPMENT

Mauritius to provide automatic tax information exchange for India

(*Jagran Josh*, May 27, 2014)

Seeking to allay apprehensions about Mauritius being used for money laundering activities, its Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam has stated that the island nation has decided to provide automatic exchange of tax related information with India.

Automatic exchange of information involves the systematic and periodic transmission of bulk taxpayer information by the source country to the residence country concerning various categories of income. The categories of income include dividends, interest, royalties, salaries, pensions, etc. It can provide timely information on non-compliance where tax has been evaded either on an investment return or the underlying capital sum even where tax administrations have had no previous indications of non-compliance.

The proposal for automatic tax information exchange was floated by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and was fully endorsed in September 2013 by G20 leaders. In February 2014, the OECD released the Standard for Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information that calls on jurisdictions to obtain information from their financial institutions and automatically exchange that information with other jurisdictions on an annual basis.

On the contentious issue of revision of a tax treaty between two countries, he states that “there must be a quick resolution to resolve all issues related to the direct tax avoidance agreement between the two countries. We both agreed that there must be quick resolution (on the issues) for certainty, clarity and predictability.” The India-Mauritius DTAA is being revised amid concerns that Mauritius is being used for round-tripping of funds into India even though that country has always maintained that there have been no concrete evidence of any such misuse.

<http://www.jagranjosh.com/current-affairs/mauritius-decided-to-provide-automatic-tax-information-exchange-to-india-1401284069-1>

Date Accessed: 29.05.2014

(Deepti Somani)

EDUCATION

India inks \$1 bn loan pact with World Bank to improve quality of education

(*Prashant K Nanda, LiveMint*, May 30, 2014)

India has signed a \$1 billion credit agreement with World Bank to improve quality of education in schools till class eight. With more than 96% of children having access to elementary education, the new agreement won't focus on access but on improving quality under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

The World Bank has earlier supported the government-funded scheme with two rounds of loans totaling \$1.85 billion, the bank and the finance ministry said in a joint statement. Government uses SSA to implement its right to education law.

Several studies have indicated that the quality of school education is deteriorating in India, though the country has made significant progress in terms of access. The 2013 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) by education non-profit Pratham had found that while three out of every five students in class five were able to read Class two textbooks in 2005, only one out of two is up to the task now.

The objective of this project, worth more than \$1 billion, is to improve education outcomes of over 200 million ele-

mentary schoolchildren and 4.5 million teachers in India. “The benefits of the project also include development of grade and subject-specific learning indicators to measure children’s progress in acquiring expected knowledge and skills at different grade level,” the statement said.

The programme will be implemented by the human resource development ministry in next three years. In 2012-13, number of out-of-school kids had declined to 2.9 million, down from 32 million in 2001.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/zS9qkb0ITXOKtoM7SsnSbP/India-inks-1-bn-loan-pact-with-World-Bank.html>

Date Accessed: 29.05.2014

(Deepti Somani)

HEALTH

Economic cost of tobacco consumption estimated at 1.16% of GDP

(Deccan Herald, May 29, 2014)

Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) in its recent study report entitled ‘Economic Burden of Tobacco Related Diseases in India’ estimated direct and indirect costs from all diseases caused due to tobacco use and four specific diseases namely, respiratory diseases, tuberculosis, cardiovascular diseases and cancers. According to the report, tobacco use and the associated costs are creating an enormous burden for the nation. The total economic costs attributable to tobacco use from all diseases in India in the year 2011 amounted to a staggering Rs. 1,04,500 crores. Looking through GDP lens this is 1.16 percent of GDP and 12 percent more than the combined state and central government expenditure on health care in 2011.

The report also brings out that massive direct medical costs of tobacco attributable diseases amounted to Rs.16,800 crore and associated indirect morbidity cost of Rs. 14,700 crore. The cost from premature mortality was Rs. 73,000 crores, indicating a substantial productive loss to the nation.

Four diseases – heart diseases, cancer, tuberculosis and respiratory disorders – were mainly caused by tobacco. The researchers claimed that for the first time, they calculated economic loss for 13 large states using the latest population data. Sarit Rout, a research scientist at Public Health Foundation of India said, “Karnataka not only fared better than three other large southern states but it is actually one of the better performing states, where economic loss due to tobacco is one of the lowest among the 13 states studied in the report.”

After releasing the report Union Health minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan suggested taxes on tobacco products has to be too high to deter at least a large section of people from picking up the deadly habit in the first place. He said, “Taxes on tobacco must be increased. I am going to make a strong recommendation to the Union finance minister.”

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/410545/health-minister-push-higher-tax.html>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Jeet Singh)

Average Indian lives longer now: WHO

(im4change)

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) Report titled ‘World Health Statistics 2014’, In India, life expectancy at birth (both sexes, in years) has increased from 58 in 1990 to 66 in 2012. While life expectancy at birth for men rose from 57 in 1990 to 64 in 2012, the same for women rose from 58 in 1990 to 68 in 2012. The report delineates the performance made on the health front by India vis-à-vis other nations between 1990 and 2012. It also presents the challenges that the new government at the Centre should try to resolve.

The following table shows that life expectancy at birth during 2012 in India still lagged behind that in Brazil, China and Sri Lanka.

Table 1: Life Expectancy at birth (years) during 2012 in selected countries

	Both sexes	Male	Female
India	66	64	68
China	75	74	77
Brazil	74	70	77
Sri Lanka	75	71	78

Source: World Health Statistics 2014

The main findings of the report are:

- Total expenditure on health as % of gross domestic product has declined from 4.3 percent in 2000 to 3.9 percent in 2011.
- Social security expenditure on health as % of general government expenditure on health has declined from 18.3 percent in 2000 to 15.8 percent in 2011.
- Percentage of population using improved drinking-water sources was 70 percent in 1990, 81 percent in 2000 and 93 percent in 2012.
- Percentage of population using improved sanitation was 18 percent in 1990, 25 percent in 2000 and 36 percent in 2012.
- While Adult Mortality Rate (probability of dying between 15 and 60 years of age per 1000 population) among men fell from 288 in 1990 to 242 in 2012, the same for women declined from 242 in 1990 to 160 in 2012.
- Immunization coverage among 1 year olds for measles was 74 percent, for DTP3 was 72 percent and for HepB3 was 70 percent during 2012.

<http://www.im4change.org/news-alerts/average-indian-lives-longer-now-who-25061.html>

Date Accessed: 28.05.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

ENERGY

Pakistan likely to import LNG from India

(*Exim News Service, May 26, 2014*)

Pakistan and India plans to sign a pact regarding the import of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Pakistan plans to import LNG from India. The country plans to import 200 million cubic feet per day of LNG via a pipeline through the Wagah border.

But, there exist an obstruction before this import to take place. The hurdle that lies is the cost since the rate at which India would sell the gas to Pakistan is seen as being too high. India is prepared to sell LNG to Pakistan at around \$21 per mmBtu after taking into account duties, transportation cost and local taxes, while Pakistan intends to pay a maximum of \$17 per mmBtu, as per the sources.

<http://www.eximin.net/NewsDetails.aspx?name=75872>

Date Accessed: 29.5.2014

(Shruti Issar)

ENVIRONMENT

Environment ministry renamed, online system for green clearances launched

(Kumar Sambhav S, *Down to Earth*, May 30, 2014)

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has undergone a nomenclature change and been renamed as the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The nomenclature change indicates the government's acknowledgment of the serious challenge that climate change poses. It is significant as India is set to present its case in international forums on climate change very forcefully.

In another development, the ministry announced that it will accept the online applications for environment clearances for the development projects. The system for online applications for environment clearances was launched by new environment minister Prakash Javedkar on May 29. With the launch, BJP has delivered to one of its major campaign promises to ensure time-bound, hassle-free clearances to development projects.

The online system will ensure transparency and real-time monitoring since the applicant will be provided with a username and password through which the applicant can keep track of his/her application. It will also be able to address the issue of adherence to timelines in the process of environment clearances because there shall be a maximum time limit for the entire approval process, with stage-wise timelines and continuous efforts shall be made to bring down the timelines for each stage.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/environment-ministry-renamed-online-system-green-clearances-launched-0>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Simi Sunny)

National Afforestation Project to be launched in Kerala

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

A novel initiative by GreenVein, a foundation in Kochi, to plant one billion trees across the country will begin in Kerala on the World Environment Day (June 5). The initiative is promoted by the Abhedha Ganga Maiya Trust, Haridwar. "The project aims at holding extensive afforestation programmes throughout India. Trees that fit into the geography, habitat, culture and demography will be selected locally for plantation. Afforestation on degraded forest land, urban and rural habitats, farm lands, wetlands and other degraded or other forms of land will also come under the purview of the project, which will enable larger participation with diversity in approach." In phases, the project will be extended to all the Indian states and union territories.

The project has a comprehensive approach, including selection of appropriate seeds, adoption of planting methods, finding local community partners, identifying resource partners and ensuring the long-term goal of restoring natural forests. The locations will include rural, semi-urban and urban areas, which will depend on the availability and requirement.

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/National-Afforestation-Project-to-be-Launched-in-the-State/2014/05/28/article2249787.ece>

Date Accessed: 28.05.2014

(Anjana John)

Global warming threatens more deadly Everest-like avalanches, says report

(*The Indian Express*, May 20, 2014)

Mountaineering tourism in Nepal faces a threat from global warming as melting glaciers feed the risk of more deadly disasters such as the avalanche on Mount Everest that killed 16 people last month. Every year, the country receives more than 2,000 foreign mountaineers to climb the world's highest mountain, generating revenue of \$3.4 million.

“Rising global temperatures have shrunk the total area of Nepal’s glaciers by almost a quarter between 1977 and 2010, with an average of 38 sq. km (14.67 sq. miles) vanishing every year, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), based in the Nepali capital, says in a report.” Besides bringing harsher and more frequent floods, avalanches and landslides affecting trekkers and millions of people living in remote mountain villages, it also affects others sectors like economy, agriculture, irrigation and power generation .

<http://indianexpress.com/article/world/climate-change/global-warming-threatens-more-deadly-everest-like-avalanches-says-report/>

Date Accessed: 27.05.2014

(Anjana John)

Green tax on vehicles made mandatory in Uttar Pradesh

(Anupam Chakravartty, *Down to Earth*, May 29, 2014)

To bring vehicular pollution under control, the Uttar Pradesh government has recently made green tax mandatory for all the motor vehicles which are over 15 years old.

In a cabinet meeting held on May 20, the UP cabinet agreed for the amendment in the UP Motor Vehicles Act and decided that all the vehicles that have completed 15 years from the manufacturing date will be registered again and 'green tax' would be levied on them at that time. Non-transport or private vehicles will have to pay 10 per cent of the due tax at the time of renewal of registration as green tax. The modalities of the 'green tax' would be announced soon.

“The number of vehicles in Noida has increased by three folds between 2004 and 2012. This is the largest increase in the state. The introduction of 'green tax' on vehicles in UP will address only one aspect of environmental pollution. The tax structure that will be implemented by UP government will make public transport vehicles pay more as compared to privately-owned vehicles.”

According to experts, “the green tax structure ensures more burden on public transport vehicles whereas cars and private vehicles remain largely unaffected. According to the UP transport department, if a vehicle was registered in 1999, in 2014 it will pay 10 per cent of vehicles cost as green tax. There might be around 4.5 lakh vehicles which are over 15 years. However, the state also plans to earn from the vehicles entering Uttar Pradesh. This is to ensure that even the bordering states adopt similar mechanisms.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/green-tax-vehicles-made-mandatory-0>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Neha Singh)

AGRICULTURE

Hundreds of farmers die due to electric shocks

(Rahul Devulapalli, *The Hindu*, May 28, 2014)

Response to an RTI query has revealed that about 2, 020 farmers died due to electricity shocks in six years, between 2005 and 2012, in 11 districts of India. A series of RTI queries were filed by activists D. Rakesh Reddy and K.

District name	Number of farmer deaths due to electric shocks
Nizamabad	400
Warangal	254
Khammam	243
Karimnagar	231
Kadapa	116
Guntur	117
Nellore	42

Source: Information as provided by Transco

An analysis of this data also showed that the regions with relatively better canal irrigation have lesser farmer deaths. Hence, government intervention to promote canal irrigation is required to prevent such incidents of deaths caused due to erratic electricity supply. RTI applicant Rakesh Reddy is of the view that there is a correlation between electric shock deaths and availability of canal irrigation. He explained that electricity consumption in Telangana is higher due to lack of irrigation canals. In such districts, human cost is more. "Bad quality of power and erratic supply" increase the threat of farmer deaths due to electrocution. He proposed that canal irrigation should be promoted so as to minimise such incidents. He also said that new governments should concentrate on providing quality power supply to the farmers at systematic timings.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Hyderabad/shocking-hundreds-of-ryots-die-due-to-electrocution/article6054315.ece?ref=sliderNews>

Date Accessed: 28.05.2014

(Mahima Malik)

Assam tea growers seek irrigation subsidy

(The Shillong Times, May 30, 2014)

"Hit by a severe drought-like situation and erratic rainfall, the tea growers' organisations in Assam have asked the government to launch a subsidy scheme for irrigation which can be availed of by tea estates of all sizes."

Reports show that "production is already low this year compared to the last two years, and the overall figures are likely to suffer if this situation persists." The state produced about 620 million kg of tea last year, and 580 million kg in 2012 and this year by April the state was 40 per cent behind the production figures compared to that of last year.

North Eastern Tea Association (NETA) chairman Bidyananda Barkakoty reported that over 60 percent of the tea growing areas in Assam does not have proper irrigation facilities. The association also approached "the Tea Board of India for some scheme ensuring 60 percent subsidy for general irrigation and 75 percent subsidy for drip irrigation so that it is affordable for all tea estates." He further added that "Only estates run by large corporate houses have irrigation facilities. However, small growers, who contribute a large chunk of the state's total tea production, do not have irrigation facilities in their gardens."

Experts say this has been the worst season in the last 25 years as the gardens were forced to stop plucking in April-end even in rain-fed areas like Doomdooma in Tinsukia district."

<http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2014/05/30/assam-tea-growers-seek-irrigation-subsidy/>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Junty Sharma Pathak)

Assam agri–scenario very pathetic

(Staff Reporter, *The Sentinel*, May 29, 2014)

The article reports that despite huge investment by the Assam Agriculture Department, agricultural production in the state is very low. It further says that in spite of lakhs of seeds of paddy, potato, onion etc supplied to the farmers by the Agriculture Department the state had to buy agricultural commodities from outside.

“According to government records, in 2012–13, 8,799 quintals of potato seeds and 100 quintals of onion were brought from outside the State. But the production of potato was 7.09 lakh metric ton while that of onion was just 0.26 metric ton. The consumer demand in the State was fulfilled only to the extent of 24 per cent in case of potato and 27 per cent in case of onion.”

“Under the Onion Mission in the State, 100 quintals of onion seeds were distributed among 10,069 beneficiaries in 21 districts, but there was no information with the Agriculture Department regarding the total production.” “Some farmers have alleged that the seeds provided by the State Agriculture Department are of very quality, as a result of which there is no adequate production.”

The article also reveals that in spite of the prevailing scenario the Assam Agriculture Department has received awards for its achievements.

<http://www.sentinelassam.com/mainnews/story.php?sec=1&subsec=0&id=193236&dtP=2014-05-30&ppr=1#193236>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Junty Sharma Pathak)

REGIONAL

Concerted action to reduce tobacco use in Kerala

(*Newshunt*, May 20, 2014)

In view of increasing health hazards in Kerala, the Union Home Affairs Ministry has urged the state to implement “Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce Production, Supply and Distribution) Act (COTPA) of 2003” in the state in a strict frame. The Ministry has suggested a coordinated approach including social, economic, educational and legal measures to reduce such rising consumption of tobacco.

At the district level, COTPA violations are included as one of the agenda items in the monthly crime review meetings. Information and reports will be generated at the State/district level and forwarded to the Union Ministries of Home Affairs and Health and Family Welfare thrice a year for monitoring at the national level. The stricter implementation of COTPA has already been initiated by the state police, effectively penalising smoking in public places. During January 2014, 6,014 persons were fined and Rs.10,46,900 were collected from this head by the state police for smoking in public places. While in February, 6,073 persons were booked for smoking in public places and Rs.20,93,250 collected as fine. Some of the important areas of concern which the Act will address are “prohibitions on smoking at public spaces, on all forms of direct/indirect advertisement, on promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products, on sale of tobacco products to minors and within a radius of 100 yards of educational institutions. It also imposes mandatory depiction of specified health warnings on all tobacco products.”

http://m.newshunt.com/in/english/the-hindu/kerala/concerted-action-to-reduce-tobacco-use-in-kerala_29339898/997

Date Accessed: 27.05.2014

(Mahima Malik)

Bihar bans over-the-counter sale of Oxytocin

(*Alok Gupta, Down To Earth*, May 27, 2014)

With the aim of stopping dairy farmers from using contaminated Oxytocin to increase milk production, the Bihar State Health Society (BSHS) has imposed an immediate ban on over-the-counter sale of Oxytocin injections. Oxytocin is used to increase milk in pregnant cows and ripen fruits and vegetables.

However, many illegally manufactured Oxytocin injections have flooded the market posing a potential health hazard to consumers of milk or food laced with oxytocin. According to a drug inspector, in order to keep the price competitive, drug manufacturers compromise on quality. The drug inspectors had earlier reported to the health department about contaminated Oxytocin injections being used for veterinary purposes.

Oxytocin can lead to decreased heart rate, brain damage and seizures in foetus. It can also cause low blood pressure and uterine rupture.

The BSHS has asked pharmaceuticals to submit their stock statuses with regard to Oxytocin vials in order to build a record of the availability of the drug in that state. In addition to this, drug inspectors have been instructed to conduct raids on illegal manufacturers and users of the same.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/bihar-bans-over-counter-sale-oxytocin>

Date Accessed: 27.05.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Delhi Jal Board expecting success in Low-Cost Water project in Delhi Colony

(Vishnu Varma, *New York Times*, May 27, 2014)

Despite the failure of the pilot project aimed at providing regular supply of drinking water in Sawda Ghera, the Delhi Jal Board is planning to continue with the project.

The project, which began in Sawda Ghera on October last year, was a collaborative effort of the Jal Board and Sarvajal- a social enterprise supported by Piramal Foundation. Under it, 11 automatic vending machines were installed in the colony to provide water on a pay-per-use basis. Residents could draw water after making a payment using rechargeable prepaid smart cards. The amount was equivalent to around 2 United States cents per litre.

Nevertheless, usage of these water A.T.M's remained low, with only 950 out of the 8,5000 households having paid fee for a smart card in the colony. Most of the residents are unwilling to pay for water, which has been provided for free by the Jal Board through water tankers on a daily basis.

The colony has a majority of day labourers and the water prices were fixed ensuring that they are affordable. Apart from the residents' unwillingness to pay for water, the lack of incentive by the Delhi Jal Board to try and increase use has also affected its success.

However, Jal Board officials argue that the use of A.T.M.s are likely to rise as the hot summer season intensifies. Continuing with a positive outlook, Mr. Sharma- chief operating officer of Sarvajal, argues that the company expected to see residents use 8,000 litres a day by 2015.

http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/low-cost-water-is-hard-sell-in-delhi-colony/?php=true&_type=blogs&_php=true&_type=blogs&ref=world&_r=1&#

Date Accessed: 27.05.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Jharkhand amongst bottom 3 states in expenditure of MGNREGA funds

(Basant Kumar Mohanty, *The Telegraph*, May 29, 2014)

Despite having more than 50 percent households living in dire poverty, expenditure of funds under the national job guarantee scheme remains the amongst the lowest in Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar. Data from the Union Ministry of rural development reveals that these three states jointly account for only 11 percent of the total expenditure of around Rs. 30,000 crore under MGNREGS in 2013-14.

According to a former National Advisory Council (NAC) member, implementation agencies like the Panchayati Raj institutions and respective district administrations have not been efficient in their work. Panchayats are responsible for planning projects under the scheme which includes assessing the demand for work, preparing estimates and projecting labour budget for the year.

Additionally, the deficit of junior engineers who are responsible for making measurement of work which are necessary to make wage payments under the scheme also impact the situation.

Moreover, a feudal system in the areas pursued by the landlords, who want cheap agricultural labour act as major hurdle as well. Consequently, the Panchayati Raj that was aimed at decentralising power is controlled by a coterie of influential people.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140529/jsp/frontpage/story_18393566.jsp#.U4cR5_mSyaJ

Date Accessed: 29.05.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Tea Garden Workers living in Dire Condition in West Bengal

(Darjeeling Times, May 22, 2014)

Despite earning large revenues for the Bengal government, tea garden workers are dying due to starvation in the Red Bank tea estate in Dooars. As many as 32 deaths have been reported since October 2013.

In the absence of political will that seeks to even recognise this as a problem, a group- Darjeeling & Dooars Tea Garden Workers Relief Organisation (DAWN)- that consists of like-minded people have joined hands to support the tea garden workers. The primary concern in the initial stages is to pool funds to provide relief to the workers in the form of ration.

Supreet Raj, a member of DAWN, explains as to how the limited skills of tea garden workers are impeding their ability to earn a living. Adequate training programmes can empower these workers enabling them to gain employment outside their comfort zone and in neighbouring areas. There are other groups like Who Cares who are providing pulses, rice and other basic amenities to the people in the estate.

According to Pallawib Rai, who was in-charge of the ground work for DAWN, the estate revealed high levels of malnourishment amongst residents. He added that apart from dilapidated body frames, people have been ill for more than five months without basic medical facilities. Medication in a good hospital in the city is unaffordable for them.

Despite the Indian tea industry boasting of having over 20 percent global production and 12 percent international market share worth of billions of dollars and an equally thriving domestic market, closed estates, abandoned gardens, unpaid workers and poor conditions of workers taint the achievements claimed by the industry.

<http://darjeelingtimes.com/a-new-dawn-rises-in-darjeeling-to-save-starving-tea-garden-workers/>

Date Accessed: 29.05.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Yashaswini Scheme for urban co-operative societies in Karnataka

(The New Indian Express, May 28, 2014)

Karnataka launched the Yashaswini Health Insurance Scheme for members of urban cooperative societies in the state. People registered with the cooperatives will be eligible for free medical treatment up to Rs 2.5 lakh. The scheme will be implemented starting from June 1 and beneficiaries will be able to avail services three months after they become members in the cooperatives. The Yashaswini Cooperative Farmers Healthcare Scheme, which presently has over six lakh enrolled members from rural cooperative societies will soon be extended to the entire state's population of 6.5 crore.

Main features of the new Health Insurance are:

- The beneficiary should be a member of urban co-ops for at least three months. Cooperative societies do not include defunct, liquidated and employee cooperative societies
- The beneficiary should have Yashaswini card for himself/herself and family members
- The beneficiary can enroll five family members in the scheme
- Family members aged over 75 years cannot avail benefits
- A premium of Rs 1,010 per year should be paid and for beneficiaries under SC/ST category, a premium of Rs 810 should be paid
- If a sixth family member is enrolled, then the total premium will be reduced by 15 per cent
- Members can avail basic outpatient treatment for Rs 100 and specialty treatment for Rs 200, and free follow up check-up for the next three months at any of 496 network hospitals

- Members can avail 25 per cent discount on clinical investigations which should be paid directly to the hospitals
- Members can avail healthcare for a total of Rs 1.75 lakh for a single admission. With multiple admissions you can avail treatment up to Rs 2.5 lakh
- 823 types of operations are covered under the scheme

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/Yashaswini-Scheme-For-Urban-Co-ops/2014/05/28/article2249812.ece>

Date Accessed: 28.05.2014
(Anjana John)

Karnataka government's new idea of income: Shaadi tax (*Deccan Chronicle*, May 30, 2014)

Karnataka government is considering levying tax on extravagant and lavish wedding ceremonies. Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister T.B. Jayachandra said people spending over Rs 5 lakh for holding marriage ceremonies may be taxed. The government is planning to introduce this law by bringing an amendment to the existing Karnataka Marriages (Registration and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1976. The money collected through such tax would be utilised to conduct simple marriages including mass and inter-caste marriages.

State law and parliamentary affairs minister T.B. Jayachandra said "Rich and middle class families in the city spend a lot on marriages. It is nothing but vulgar display of wealth, and it has to be restricted by imposing tax. To show off their wealth, the rich invite thousands of people to weddings in air-conditioned halls. I have taken up the idea of imposing a tax on extravagant marriages following discussions in the Legislative Assembly and the Council, where members suggested that the government levy tax on lavish marriages. The members have also suggested that we encourage mass marriages", he added.

He said he would make the next move after getting a feedback from people. Such a tax was first introduced by the government in Kerala where the guest-list should not exceed 300, the minister added.

<http://www.deccanchronicle.com/140530/nation-current-affairs/article/karnataka-government%E2%80%99s-new-idea-income-shaadi-tax>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014
(Jeet Singh)

Jharkhand yet to clear plan to mark out land for iron ore mining

(*Neha Sethi and Pranav Nambiar, LiveMint*, May 29, 2014)

The Jharkhand government hasn't yet cleared a plan to mark out land in the Saranda forest that can be mined for iron ore; although a clutch of steel makers have been waiting for environmental clearances since 2009. The forest advisory committee of the Union environment ministry still doesn't have a wildlife management plan of the area that it had asked the state government to prepare in 2009.

Jharkhand had in August 2011 constituted an expert committee to come up with an integrated plan for the Saranda forest, one of India's largest. The panel submitted a draft plan in early 2012 and a final plan in April last year. The state government is yet to approve of it.

The initial draft of the expert panel recommended that about 61,000 hectares (ha) of forest in Saranda be declared as inviolate, where no mining would be allowed, to ensure conservation of wildlife. The suggestion was approved by the Wildlife Institute of India, but the reserved area was reduced to 53,800 ha in the final draft.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/7ooPceweyX0S3KbPEmGEkJ/Jharkhand-yet-to-clear-plan-to-mark-out-land-for-iron-ore-mi.html>

Date Accessed: 29.05.2014
(Deepti Somani)

Bihar cancels 60% MNREGS job cards

(Satyavrat Misra, *Business Standard*, May 28, 2014)

Bihar government has decided to cancel almost 60% job cards issued under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) in a single stroke which is likely to affect more than 7.25 million people enrolled under the scheme.

The state government had issued more than 12.7 million job cards since 2006. According to the government, out of these job card holders only 5.5 million have done work at some point of time. The rest of the job cards were not used at all.

Officials stated that the decision to cancel the cards will improve the efficiency and transparency under this scheme. State Rural Development Minister stated, "Ever since this scheme has been in effect, these people have not sought job even for a single day. There is no point having them in our muster roll. It also increases the chances of malpractices and corruption. Hence, we have to take this route." The government officials also state that the validity of these cards were over. "Job cards issued under MNREGS are valid for 5 years, The clean up was long overdue. Technically we have cancelled those job cards which are no longer active. The rest of the 5.5 million job cards owners would now be issued a new job card after the verification." The ministry insists that the step will not forbid people, whose cards have been cancelled, from reapplying for new job cards.

In the past, state government has also reported issues in relation to MNREGS. Several CAG reports have criticised the state governments' over poor implementation of this scheme. According to last year's report of the government's auditor, only 13 per cent of the job cards holders could actually get work under this employment generation scheme. It also states that the state government does not follow norms of work prioritisation, giving preference to lower priority works and the state government had constantly failed fixing workdays and chalking out a clear strategy for defining work; causing a loss of Rs 9,684 crore as central assistance in last fiscal year.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/bihar-cancels-60-mnregs-job-cards-114052801466_1.html

Date Accessed: 29.05.2014
(Deepti Somani)

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Centre for Heritage Studies to record Kerala heritage

(*The Hindu*, May 26, 2014)

The Centre for Heritage Studies (CHS) at Tripunithura has initiated a door-to-door heritage survey that will document Kerala's cultural heritage. The interdisciplinary survey would provide a detailed picture of social, economic, and political structures of each region in Kerala. The initiative seeks to document the information and create a knowledge registry of the state's diverse culture.

Kerala's heritage is unique having all its village culturally different. The proposed method of study was tried out several years ago at Vaniyamkulam in Palakkad with some success. The CHS will try out the proposal through a pilot heritage survey of the Kuttanad region.

N.M. Nampoothiri, dean of academic affairs of CHS has explained the process of the survey. Students will be sent to the panchayat and ward levels to conduct door to door heritage survey and collect information about historical documents, artefacts, architecture and the oral history of each region. Additionally, the data collected by the students

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/centre-for-heritage-studies-to-record-kerala-heritage/article6048578.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 26.05.2014

(Mahima Malik)

Ending cruelty to animals by banning JalliKattu

(The Hindu, May 13, 2014)

The article notes that The Supreme Court's decision to ban the practice of jallikattu, the popular bull-taming sport associated with annual harvest festivities in Tamil Nadu, has made it clear that the law on prevention of cruelty to animals "overshadows or overrides the so-called tradition and culture." In its decision the "Court has given primacy to the safety of human participants and animals". "The proscription flows from two principal considerations: the avoidance of cruelty and the continued inability of jallikattu organisers and authorities to avoid injuries and fatalities to human participants and bulls, despite regulations." The author argues that "if Tamil tradition, religion and culture were invoked to justify the continuation of jallikattu, its association with cultural pride had made it politically impossible for local authorities to stop it altogether."

In 2009, Tamil Nadu enacted a law to regulate jallikattu, but despite its stringent provisions, animal rights activists and the Animal Welfare Board of India continued see it as a bull-baiting exercise that perpetrates cruelty. "Reports from the field apprised the Supreme Court about deaths and injuries on and off the arena and the different forms of cruelty the animals were subjected to in their training...Expanding the notion of rights to animal welfare, the Court has held that the State's regulatory legislation is merely anthropocentric and has to be struck down as it is repugnant to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, an eco-centric Central law."

The author concludes by noting that there "may be sporadic protests and attempts through the political leadership to seek a review of the verdict and arguments that many other practices involving cruelty and danger to life are allowed to continue. However, as in the case of many old traditions that have been given up as repugnant to modern day standards, the State would be better off without this relic from a feudal past."

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/ending-cruelty-to-animals/article6002031.ece>

Date Accessed: 21.05.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

INDIA IN THE WORLD

Government to connect P.I.Os & N.R.Is with INDIA

(Press Information Bureau, May 28, 2014)

The Government is to try to connect more and more People of Indian Origin (PIO) and Non Residential Indians (NRIs) abroad with India and in its economic process so that it will be mutually beneficial for India, PIOs and NRIs, said Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, Smt. Sushma Swaraj.

The Minister added that now, the Indian Missions abroad will be more sensitised and the problems, issues faced by Indians abroad can be addressed in a more effective and fruitful manner because the work and function can be coordinated better.

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=105131>

Date Accessed: 29.05.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India a shareholder in Obama's vision of a collaborative world

(ET Bureau, *Economic Times*, May 30, 2014)

The president of the United States Barack Obama in his commencement speech at West Point military academy said that as a rising middle class - from Brazil to India - competes with Americans, and as new nations embrace democracy and market economies, the US has to be ready to respond to this new world order.

Explaining how world is changing at accelerating speed Obama said, "From Brazil to India, rising middle classes compete with our own, and governments seek a greater say in global forums. And even as developing nations embrace democracy and market economies, 24 hour news and pervasive social media makes it impossible to ignore sectarian conflicts, failing states and popular uprisings that might have received only passing notice a generation ago." He outlined his vision of the use of American military power in the world and called for collaborative approach and use of force only if necessary.

The speech has come as an acknowledgement of the growing interdependence of the world in economics and politics and the need for all nations to collaborate and cooperate in multiple ways to tackle common and interdependent problems. It provides India with an opportunity to find its relevance in the multi polar world and enhance its engagement with the other power poles like US. It is time that India pursues its interest in the democratisation and modernisation of the regimes like Arab and Israel that goes beyond the security of Indian migrants in the region and emerges as a stakeholder in the globalised world.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion/editorial/india-a-shareholder-in-obamas-vision-of-a-collaborative-world/articleshow/35746110.cms>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Simi Sunny)

UN labour report shows solid return for national investments in quality jobs

(UN News Centre, May 27, 2014)

This article highlights the findings of the annual report of the International Labour Organization (ILO), The World

of Work 2014. The report is subtitled 'Developing with Jobs'. Accordingly, developing countries that invested in quality jobs from the early 2000s grew nearly one percentage point faster every year since 2007 and were better able to weather the economic crisis than comparable economies.

This year the Annual report focuses on the relationship between good jobs and national development through analysis of 140 developing and emerging nations.

"Social protection, respect for core labour standards and policies that promote formal employment are also crucial for creating quality jobs that raise living standards, increase domestic consumption and drive overall growth," said Guy Ryder, Director-General of the ILO, in a news release on the launch of the report "Development doesn't happen through such things as exports, open trade and foreign direct investment on their own," he added.

The report cites Senegal as one example, where wage and salaried workers increased from around 12 per cent in 1991 to 26 per cent in 2013, as a case in point, showing that productivity increased there by an average of 0.5 per cent per year.

"In view of the evidence, it is essential to make decent work a central goal in the post-2015 development agenda," stressed Raymond Torres, Director of the ILO Research Department.

The report, also covers global unemployment figures, social protection measures and economic migration flow.

http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47897#.U4hZ4_mSyVI

Date Accessed: 28.5.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

FAO and OIE boost collaboration on animal health

(FAO, May 25, 2014)

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) have pledged to work towards controlling animal diseases, ensuring the safety of food from animal origin and promoting safe trade.

The two organizations would strengthen their efforts in priority areas that include joint response to animal health issues and programmes to prevent and control foot-and-mouth disease, *peste des petits ruminants*, African swine fever, rabies, zoonotic influenza and antimicrobial resistance.

In addition, FAO and OIE with the World Health Organization (WHO), would focus on strengthening the national veterinary systems, along with the monitoring of the responsible use of antimicrobial and pharmaceutical products.

FAO and OIE already have other collaborative initiatives including the FAO/OIE Crisis Management Centre – Animal Health, which provides rapid response during animal disease emergencies, and OFFLU, the network of expertise on animal influenza. "The organizations have worked together on issues such as the prevention, detection and control of H5N1 avian influenza, and notched up a major success in 2011 with the global eradication of the deadly cattle virus that caused rinder pest."

<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/232597/icode/>

Date Accessed: 27.05.2014

(Anjana John)

Japan to enhance government role in cyber security

(The Echo of India, May 19, 2014)

In response to increasing global online criminal activities, Japan will take a more active role in enhancing cyberspace security. The move comes in line with the government's goal of successfully hosting the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

A draft guideline prepared by a government panel discussing the matter envisages upgrading the panel into a policy forum around fiscal 2015 by establishing a relevant law. cooperate with other government bodies, including the National Security Council that makes decisions on foreign and defence policies. . Its secretariat, to be headed by a senior bureaucrat, would have contact with other countries' authorities as well as with the private sector in Japan to prepare necessary policy.

<http://www.echoofindia.com/tokyo-japan-enhance-govt-role-cybersecurity-57163>

Date Accessed: 27.05.2013

(Anjana John)

SOUTH ASIA

The untapped potential of SAARC trade

(Dipti Jain, *Live Mint*, May 27, 2014)

Over the past decade, India's trade with South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (Saarc) nations has lagged behind its trade with the rest of the world. SAARC was set up in 1985, signed by Rajiv Gandhi, to meet the objective of fostering regional trade in South Asia. However, data reflects the failure of the member nations to actively achieve the objective of the association.

Data collected from the Ministry of Commerce shows that India's growth rate of trade with SAARC nations grew at a below-average pace compared to India's trade growth rate with the rest of the world. Additionally, bulk of this growth in India's trade occurred with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and not Saarc nations. "India's trade with Asean grew at a faster clip of 16% a year in contrast to much slower, 13%, growth rate with immediate neighbours." Thus a boost in economic engagement and neighbourly relations with SAARC at policy level is important for India.

<http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/hJ71G9fEgPxzjR5A15zqrM/The-untapped-potential-of-Saarc-trade.html>

Date Accessed: 28.05.2014

(Mahima Malik)

AMERICAS

Solar-powered roads to generate power in U.S.

(*Domain b.com*, May 28, 2014)

The US government has recently approved the funding of a "solar roadway project", based on Solar Road Panel technology, which envisages generating over three times the power the US needs. For additional funds apart from federal funding, an innovative "crowd sourcing" campaign was launched by private investors in the technology which garnered funds more than \$1-million.

Solar energy based technology is expected to eliminate the need for coal-fired power plants. The mentioned project includes building an electronic support structure and a base layer which will be made from recyclable materials. Each solar panel produces DC power, which is converted by embedded micro-inverters AC.

However, opponents of the "solar roadway project" doubt its feasibility and success primarily due to huge cost of the technology. According to an estimate, for a grid of solar panels covering all roads in the US would cost \$56 trillion nearly 20 times the annual federal budget. Also, according to The Verge, replacing asphalt roads with a largely unproven technology driven by solar panels seems unreasonable. Opponents therefore suggest that planting panels along already built roads would be equally beneficial.'

http://domain-b.com/industry/power/20140528_solar_panels.html

Date Accessed: 28.05.2014

(Mahima Malik)

OPINIONS

Empowering the Public Sector Banks

(*Financial Express*, 30 May, 2014)

According to the author, PSU banks have large provisions that are needed to reduce the losses incurred by lending bad loan. In spite of these provisions, net profits for PSU lenders in FY14 fell a sharp 27%. This is in contrast with the private sector banks which ensured their profits went up by 18%.

Author also argued the fact that even without taking into account any provisioning, state-owned banks fared poorly last year with their operating profits increasing by just 5% over FY13 while for the private banks, the rise was an impressive 23%.

The performance of PSU banks has been impacted by the strained cash flows of companies in the core and infrastructure sectors, struggling in a sluggish economy. Also the large-scale restructuring of loans worth around Rs1 lakh crore during the year also contributed to the bad assets. SME sector made the matter even worse.

Though the private sector bank had to face the same problems of stressed assets, but their asset quality has not deteriorated as much and they have managed to grow their businesses, cashing in on their respective strengths.

The country's changing demographics could see private banks capturing a larger share of deposits in future lenders such as Kotak Mahindra Bank are already able to win customers by offering a higher interest rate on savings accounts. Since PSU banks will be short on capital, they need an estimated Rs.6 lakh crore in four years unless the government decides to dilute its stake in the PSUs. Author argues that "in this context, the suggestions of the PJ Nayak committee which recommended the government become a smaller stakeholder in banks and empower their boards to make them more efficient are pertinent and probably are the best way to put them back on track. Less government control and interference will help banks attract capital funds from long-term investors and also to leverage talent."

<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/editorial-empower-psu-banks/1255508/2>

Date Accessed: 30.05.2014

(Neha Singh)

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