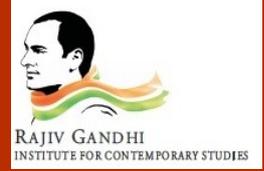


Issue
2.43

RGICS POLICY WATCH



VOL. II ISSUE - 43

23rd 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

- West Bengal presents a Model for Reform in Madrasa
- Union Home Minister reviews National Population Register Scheme(NPR)

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.

Confronting Inequality in Developing Nations



Source: topyaps.com

*Compiled by RGICS
Jawahar Bhawan, New Delhi
Issue Coordinator : Mr. Jeet Singh*

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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

Confronting Inequality in Developing Nations

Context

Inequality in any society is a persistent challenge and not a new phenomenon. If world has been a spectator of average gains against multiple indicators of material prosperity over last decades, it also has seen alarming rise in inequality within and across the nations including economic and non economic well being. Inequality has been jeopardizing economic growth and poverty reduction. It has been stalling progress in education, health and nutrition for large swathes of the population, thus undermining the very human capabilities necessary for achieving a good life. The two remarkable achievements are:

- The improvement in per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in low- and middle-income countries which has more than doubled in real terms since 1990.
- Life expectancy in developing countries has risen from 63.2 years to 68.6 years during the same period.

However, considering this improvement in isolation to various other dimensions will leave the picture incomplete. Following are the highlights from the other side:

- Although the world is globally richer than ever before, more than 1.2 billion people still live in extreme poverty.
- The richest 1% of the world population owns about 40% of the world's assets, while the bottom half owns no more than 1%.
- Despite overall declines in maternal mortality, women in rural areas are still up to three times more likely to die while giving birth than women living in urban centres.
- Social protection has been extended, yet persons with disabilities are up to five times more likely than average to incur catastrophic health expenditures.
- Women are participating more in the work force, but continue to be disproportionately represented in vulnerable employment.

Thus, Humanity still remains deeply divided. Over the last two decades, income inequality has been growing on average within and across countries. As a result, a significant majority of the world's population lives in societies that are more unequal today than before. However, there are clear signs that this situation cannot be sustained for much longer.

Key messages of the report

- High inequality undermines development by hindering economic progress, weakening democratic life and threatening social cohesion.
- During the last two decades, income inequality has significantly increased in many countries.
- Increases in income inequality over the last 20 years have been largely driven by broad globalization processes, but domestic policy choices have played an important role, too.
- There is nothing inevitable about growing income inequality; several countries managed to contain or reduce income inequality while achieving strong growth performance.
- Despite some signs of convergence, within-country disparities in education, health and nutrition remain very high.
- Income inequality remains a major driver of inequality in other dimensions of material well-being, but other factors, such as the quality of governance, social spending and social norms, matter as well.
- Inequality of outcomes and inequality of opportunities cannot be treated as separate issues; they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin.
- As demonstrated in the case of gender, narrowing gaps in key capabilities may not be sufficient to reduce disparities in other domains of human well-being, such as access to livelihoods and political agency.
- A widely held perception holds that political space for inequality reduction is very limited; however, experience shows that political space can be created.
- Redistribution remains very important to inequality reduction; however, a shift is needed towards more inclusive growth patterns in order to sustainably reduce inequality.
- Reducing inequality requires addressing inequality-reproducing cultural norms and strengthening the political agency of disadvantaged groups.

We present here an overview of a current report by United Nations Development Programme (2013) focusing on confronting inequality considering India and its policy initiatives for that matter.

Inequality of what and between whom?

Despite the inherent multidimensionality of human well-being, development theory has largely been concerned with inequality in the material dimension. Thus the discussion of inequality is mainly centered around two perspectives: *Inequality of outcomes* and *Inequality of opportunities*.

Inequality of outcomes is mainly concerned with outcomes in various material dimensions of human well-being, such as the level of income or level of educational attainment, but inequality of opportunities is concerned about the unequal access to employment or education etc

As per the first perspective, it is argued that unequal outcomes, particularly income inequality plays a key role in determining variations in human well-being. If higher incomes provide people with opportunities to secure their well-being and to get ahead in life, then a person's initial income matters. Initial income inequality can positively or negatively affect the likelihood and speed with which a person can get ahead in life.

Whereas, the second perspective emphasizes the fact that certain individuals and groups face consistently inferior opportunities—economic, political and social—than their fellow citizens. It is argued that individuals can hardly be held responsible for the circumstances of their birth: their race, sex or urban or rural location. Yet these predetermined background variables make a major difference for the lives they lead. In other words, the opportunities that people have to reach their full human potential are vastly different from the outset through no fault of their own. Not surprisingly, unequal opportunities lead to unequal outcomes (World Bank, 2006).

Inequality Matters: Gauging opinions

Earlier development thinkers focused on the relationship between economic development and inequality. More recent thinkers have broadened the lens to consider dimensions of human development and human well-being. There emerges intrinsic and the instrumental cases that why inequality matters. The intrinsic case is predicated on fairness and ethic/moral requirements. In contrast, the instrumental case is concerned with the social, economic and political consequences of high or rising inequality. The instrumentalist case suggest that inequality merits attention in the

India's experience

Kapur et al. (2011:39) provide one example of the recent thinkers view in a unique survey designed and implemented by a Dalit community in Uttar Pradesh, India. Their findings suggest that placing exclusive focus on measures of material human well-being, such as consumption expenditure, is misplaced, as it misses important changes in socially structured inequalities and hence in individuals' 'functionings'. Their survey results show substantial changes in a wide variety of social practices affecting Dalit well-being—increased personal consumption, patterns of status goods (e.g., grooming, eating), widespread adoption of 'elite' practices around social events (e.g., weddings, births), less stigmatizing personal relations of individuals across castes (e.g., economic and social interactions) and more expansion into non-traditional economic activities and occupations.

form of policy interventions to ensure that high or rising inequality does not reach extremities that hinder economic growth and/or more substantial poverty reduction.



Inequality in India

In India, inequality has multiple proliferations cutting across economy and society.

Income inequality

The global and regional trends shows an average increase in household income inequality in high-income and low-and middle-income countries, including a number of large developing economies like India, China and Indonesia. Figure1 clearly depicts that large inequality in wealth mainly drives the income inequality. Gini index of wealth distribution in India is almost double the Gini index of income distribution.

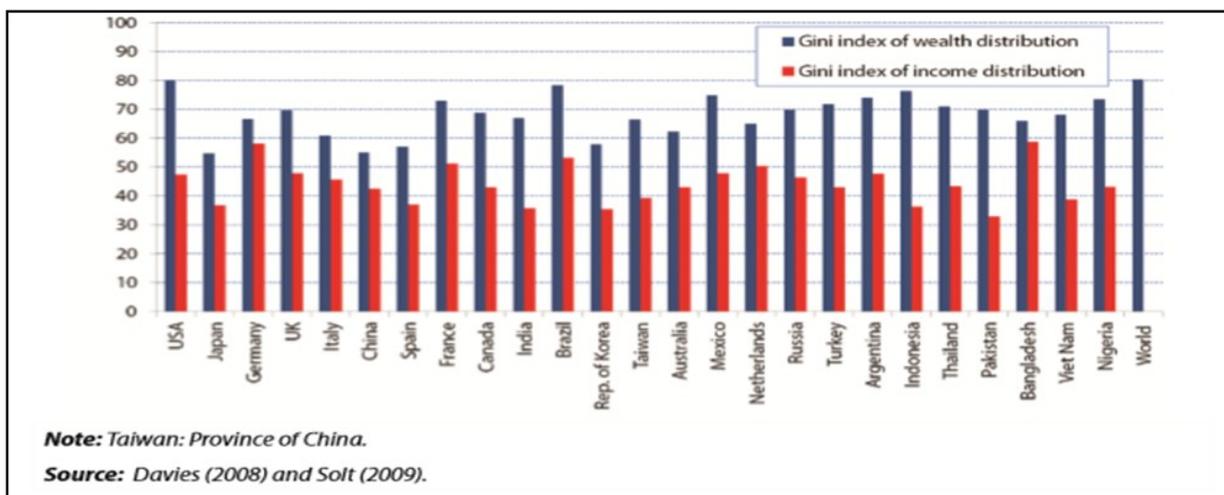


Figure1: Gini indices of wealth and income distribution in selected countries, mid-2000

Table 1: Gini index of primary household income distribution in India (early 1990s to late 2000s)

Country	Gini index of primary income distribution		Gini index of secondary income distribution		Rate of redistribution	
	Early 1990s	Late 2000s	Early 1990s	Late 2000s	Early 1990s	Late 2000s
India	33.0	35.7	31.4	34	5%	5%

Source: UNDP calculations using data from Solt (2009)

Table 2: Rates of redistribution from primary to secondary income distribution in India (early 1990s to late 2000s)

Country	Development Status	Income Status (early 1990s)	Income Status (late 2000s)	Income Status (2012)	Gini index (early-1990s)	Gini index (2000)	Gini index (2010)	Direction of Change
India	Developing	Low	Low	Lower middle	33.0	34.4	35.7	Rising

Source: UNDP calculations using data from Solt (2009).

Education and Health inequalities

Over the last decade, countries with higher lines of income performed better on indicators of average achievement in education, health and nutrition when compared to the countries with lower levels of income. Nevertheless, the rate of progress of high-income countries was rather slow relative to other income groups. Countries with high growth performance achieved improvements in some areas, such as primary completion, secondary enrolment rates, child mortality and maternal mortality rates, but not in all. Evidently, while growth might be important for improving av-

erage achievement in well-being, faster growth does not guarantee or automatically translate into faster improvements in education, health and nutrition outcomes.

In addition, the analysis of differences in education, health and nutrition outcomes across countries shows that income levels *per se* do not have a large direct impact on education, health and nutrition outcomes. To a certain extent, they make an indirect difference through other channels such as poverty reduction, governance capacity and public spending on social services. Conversely, there is evidence that countries that achieved higher growth rates also started off with higher initial levels of education, health and nutrition outcomes. This suggests that improvements in education, health and nutrition might benefit future growth.

Gender Inequality

The analysis of gender disparities provides valuable insights into broader dynamics of intergroup inequality. A multidimensional view of well-being which includes multiple domains such as capabilities, access to livelihoods and political agency has been adopted in this report to understand the development of gender-based disparities. Within the capabilities domain, the analysis shows a significant narrowing of educational gaps between genders. Also, it appears that, to a significant extent, women have achieved greater access to employment by replacing men in more vulnerable and 'lower-quality' jobs in the domain of agency, women's share of parliamentary seats has risen, but only modestly. Some countries still have no female political representatives and, among the remainder, few have achieved gender parity. India has witnessed an improvement in India's Female/Male ratio in the past two decades.

Standpoint of national policy makers on Inequality

Generally, policy makers believe that action should be taken to reduce inequality in relation to incomes and opportunities, but inequality of opportunities is seen as a significantly higher policy priority by the policy makers. They see a broad spectrum of policy options as potentially relevant to inequality reduction. Measures aimed at spreading the benefits of the capital economy more equally—mainly through support for small-scale entrepreneurship and 'non-distortive' social transfers such as conditional cash transfers were among the measures that respondents most often recommended. Among policies to reduce inequality of opportunities, reducing unemployment was seen as a high priority, along with infrastructure development (especially in rural areas) and more equal access to services, particularly education. Significantly less support—although still fairly high in absolute terms—was given to affirmative action policies and policies aimed at strengthening the political representation of disadvantaged groups.

While recognizing the need to address inequality and the relevance of several policy measures, policy makers often do not see much political space for action on inequality reduction. However, this does not mean that political space for inequality reduction cannot be created. Several potential strategies emerge from the analysis of policy makers' responses, including: the promotion of inequality reduction as a non-partisan issue relevant across the political spectrum; the promotion of a more proactive role by the national media in framing inequality as a relevant policy issue; and the constructive engagement of the business community on the assumption that the reduction of excessive inequality is a shared interest. In addition, the report highlights the importance of creating a strong space for civic engagement to further the participation of civil society organizations in policy making with a focus on inequality reduction.

Possible way forward

The report proposes to have a comprehensive policy framework to help policy makers better navigate the complexities and challenges of forming appropriate policies to address inequality based on three related pillars:

- Moderating income inequality
- Closing gaps in health, nutrition and education
- Addressing social exclusion by promoting agency, combating discrimination and transforming inequality-reproducing cultural norms.

Thus three sets of policy measures are necessary to shift the pattern of growth such that the incomes of low-income households increase more than the average:

- Employment and income generation and labour market policies
- Managing financial and trade globalization
- Inclusive growth consistent macroeconomic policies

India's initiatives to confront inequality

Economic growth can only reduce inequality if its benefits are shared widely across the population. India is pursuing various strategies to raise the income of low-income households and reduce inequality through policy initiatives. Thus India's 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) is also explicitly focused on "faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth." The plan aims to "create adequate livelihood opportunities and add to decent employment commensurate with the expectations of a growing labour force" through the acceleration of the pace of job, creation particularly in the manufacturing sector (Government of India Planning Commission, 2011).

The policy initiatives taken by India to confront the challenge are as follows:

- In India, for example, the legislated land reform since the 1960s that set ceilings for the ownership of land has been associated with poverty reduction (Besley and Burgess, 2000).
- One of the largest programmes worldwide, India's national rural employment guarantee scheme, '**Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)**' was launched in 2006 in 200 of the most backward districts of India (of 640 districts in all). This programme recognizes the right to work as a legal right and provides every rural citizen who meets a set of specific requirements the right to 100 days of remunerated employment per year. In terms of inequality, an important characteristic of this programme is the large number of women who have used it, with female participation reaching 49 percent in 2010/2011. The programme has been credited with positive impacts such as increasing rural wages, reducing distress migration, improving infrastructure, reducing unemployment and underemployment, encouraging agricultural productivity and reducing malnutrition.
- NREGA even helped to improve gender equality in the work place. It facilitated on-site care centres, among other worksite facilities (e.g., medical aid, drinking water and shade)
- The reform of inheritance laws in India, which granted women the right to inherit or own land or capital property through amendments to the Hindu Succession Act, increased women's land inheritance, but also improved their control over economic resources in the household and their intra-household bargaining power, as shown in an increase in school attendance among girls (Luke and Munshi, 2007; Deininger, et al., 2010).
- In India, quotas have been used to promote the employment of scheduled castes and tribes in the public sector.
- In India, the allocation of government jobs, admission to higher education and legislative seats to scheduled castes and tribes has helped members of these groups climb out of poverty and join the middle class.

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- Report, 'Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries'(2013), United Nations Development Programme, Accessed from- <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/humanity-divided--confronting-inequality-in-developing-countries.html>

Prepared by
Anjana John & Shruti Issar

West Bengal presents a Model for Reform in Madrasa Education

(Shamik Bag, *LiveMint*, June 14, 2014)

This article highlights secularisation of madrasa education by including religious as well as general or formal studies into the school curriculum in West Bengal. Nearly 10% of Bengal's 500,000 high madrasa student community is Hindu.

It was under the West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education Act, 1994 that formalization and secularization of madrasah education took place by giving statutory powers to the Board of Madrasah Education; the syllabus of West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education (WBBME) consequently mirrored that of the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education.

Since high madrasa education was treated at par with general education, non-Muslim students began joining in greater numbers. According to WBBME secretary Syed Nurus Salam, almost 10% of West Bengal's 512 high madrasas have Hindu headmasters, and about 18% of all teachers are Hindu.

Despite these positive developments there remain some setbacks. For example, a recent survey report by various social organisations that surfaced last month noted that only 0.4% of the surveyed Muslim community in Bengal "has access to socially preferred professions like medicine, law or engineering". Moreover, the Sachar Committee report on 2006 also highlighted similar gaps in the socio-economic and educational status of the Muslim community.

Currently, certificates issued to madrasa students are considered equivalent to those issued by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. However, some feel that the developments in Bengal indicate a "partial modernization" of madrasas. On the contrary, Kerala, even without a formal board, has seen individual madrasas forging associations with colleges and universities and stressing on technical education.

On the other hand, some others like Rama Shyam- a former assistant professor at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences- assert that the struggle to introduce non-religious studies in madrasas persists in Mumbai. While the clergy's reluctance comes from its identification of these institutions as seats of power, Shyam adds that unlike Bengal, Maharashtra has a history of religious polarisation that have led to complete segregation of madrasas. Consequently, it is difficult to find Hindu students enrolling in madrasas in regions other than Bengal.

http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/3IBDqNkSr4Py8O3uJW2VuI/Education--Class-act.html?utm_source=copy

Date Accessed: 19.06.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Union Home Minister reviews National Population Register Scheme(NPR)

(*Press Information Bureau*, June 18, 2014)

Union Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, has reviewed the scheme of the National Population Register (NPR), which is also the biggest security and e- Governance initiative in the world.

"The Home Minister directed that effective steps be taken to take the project to its logical conclusion which is the creation of the National Register of Indian Citizens. He instructed that all necessary proposals including the updating of the database through linkages with the Birth and Death registration system and the issuance of National Identity Cards to Citizens be brought for approval at the earliest."

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=105709>

Date Accessed: 19.06.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

Sebi propose norms for ‘crowdfunding’

(The Statesman, June 18, 2014)

Facilitating companies to raise fund and also check misuses of such avenues, The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) proposed new norms for "crowdfunding" or collection of funds through web-based platforms and social networking sites.

Under the proposed norms, crowdfunding platforms can be provided by only Sebi-registered entities, while companies can raise up to Rs 10 crore in a year through this route. Given the high-level of risks associated with this new way of fund-raising activity, the Sebi has also proposed that only "accredited investors" be allowed to participate in crowdfunding activities. Such investors would include institutional investors, companies, HNIs and financially-secure retail investors advised by investment advisors or portfolio managers.

Besides, the crowdfunding investment of retail investors would be capped at Rs 60,000 or 10 per cent of their net-worth. Also, only those entities would be allowed to raise funds through crowdfunding which are not associated with a business group having turnover of more than Rs 25 crore. Entities with an established business, already listed on a stock exchange or being in existence for four years or more would be barred too.

<http://www.thestatesman.net/news/60163-sebi-propose-norms-for-crowdfunding.html>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Jeet Singh)

DEVELOPMENT

Govt plans 'soil health cards' for all farmers

(Vishwa Mohan, *Times of India*, June 17, 2014)

The Centre will soon launch a comprehensive plan to provide 'Soil Health Card' to all farmers across the country with a view to spur agricultural growth. The card will carry crop-wise recommendations of nutrients/fertilizers required for farms, making it possible for farmers to improve productivity by wisely using inputs.

A computerized system will be developed, allowing local agriculture science centres to keep details of 'soil test' results. The system will, eventually, allow farmers to download the 'Soil Health Card' using 'unique number' allotted to each soil sample. This way, any change in ownership of the particular farm land will not create any problem in getting such cards or getting it updated.

Though a few states including Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Haryana had successfully distributed such cards a couple of years ago, most states did not make it operational beyond villages around various agricultural universities. The Centre's fresh move will make it universal.

Distributing 'Soil Health Card' to all farmers and providing irrigation facility to all villages under the 'Pradhan Mantri Gramin Krishi Yojna' across the country will be two major components of the new govt's agricultural policy.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Govt-plans-soil-health-cards-for-all-farmers/articleshow/36689371.cms>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Delhi becomes first kerosene-free city in India

(*India Today*, June 17, 2014)

The Delhi Government has announced the national capital as the first 'kerosene-free city' in the country. A scheme called 'Delhi: A Kerosene-Free City Scheme, 2012', had been implanted for this motive and no subsidised kerosene is being issued in the national capital. Through this the country can save upto Rs.200 crores each year. The scheme was implemented in 2012 for which Delhi Government had incurred an expenditure of Rs.62 crores.

Earlier, Delhi was getting about 53,000 Kilolitre of kerosene oil every year from the Centre, which was issued to entitled households at a subsidised rate. "Under the scheme, free gas connections along with LPG filled cylinders, two burner gas stove, regulator and suraksha pipe were issued to the Jhuggi Ration Card (JRC), Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Antodaya Ann Yojana (AAY) ration card holders who were using kerosene oil for cooking." This scheme could be availed by a whole of 3.56 lakhs such ration card holders but those families which already had an LPG connection were not eligible under it.

This action would facilitate in environment conservation since there will be no toxic fumes emanating from burning the oil, lesser possibility of adulteration in petrol and positive impact on air pollution. Also, it would enhance the quality of life of people benefited under the scheme and cause lesser fire accidents and burn injuries. Any person who indulges in kerosene oil trade can be prosecuted under Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and Delhi Kerosene Oil Control Order, 1962.

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/delhi-becomes-first-kerosene-free-city-in-india/1/367204.html>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Anjana John)

GOVERNMENT

Government to give an additional R 12,000 per household for building IAY house under MGNREGA

(Yogima Seth Sharma, *Economic Times*, June 13, 2014)

The government has decided to give Rs 12,000 per household to the poor for working on building their Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) homes under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a measure that signifies the biggest convergence of two social welfare schemes and could provide a boost to both rural employment and consumption at a time when the monsoon is expected to be below average. The two biggest welfare schemes (IAY) and (MGNREGA), which together have a corpus of more than Rs 50,000 crore will pool their resources as part of the new government's plan to provide a roof to everyone.

The government will provide the amount as labour component from MGNREGA to the poor who work on building their homes under the grant from IAY. This is likely to benefit cement, steel and local building industries as more people find encouragement to build their homes through IAY. This is being done with a view to incentivise rural households to take up construction of houses on their own, thereby saving on labour cost besides adding a significant amount to their kitty and reviving interest in MGNREGA.

The government provides Rs 75,000 for construction of a house under IAY in hilly areas and Rs 70,000 for construction of houses in the plains of which 20 per cent is the labour cost i.e. nearly Rs 14,000. As per the existing norms, only toilets could be made under MGNREGA while the beneficiary had to hire labour for construction of the house under the IAY. The additional financial support of Rs. 12,000 is likely to considerably reduce the burden on the beneficiaries as they can now demand construction of houses under MGNREGA.

Economists have welcomed the long standing demand of rationalisation of the two schemes as it shall lead to creation of productive assets.

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-06-13/news/50564682_1_mgnrega-iay-indira-awas-yojana

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Railways plan to install CCTV cameras in new coaches

(*Bihar Times*, June 15, 2014)

In order to ensure safe and secure journey of millions of its commuters, Indian railway authorities have come up with a plan to install CCTV cameras in new coaches of nearly 1,000 trains. The new coaches will have high resolution CCTV cameras in response to threats, complaints of drugging of passengers and robberies on trains in the past few years. "Several rounds of consultations between members of Railway Board and its traffic management were carried out and the railway officials have agreed to implement the plan soon.

The installation of cameras would be done in the general coaches of trains which travel through zones where drugging of passengers and crimes on running trains have been reported frequently. In addition, the train escort parties would have smart mobiles to establish contact and collect evidence and report to seniors in real time. Currently RPF and the Government Railway Police escort above 3,500 trains per day across the country.

<http://www.bihartimes.in/Newsbihar/2014/June/newsbihar16June4.html>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Anjana John)

SECURITY

Meghalaya govt has no records of Bangladeshi

(The Nagaland Post, June 12, 2014)

Meghalaya Chief Minister Mukul Sangma speaking in the state assembly during the question hour reported that the government of Meghalaya has no record of Bangladeshis who entered the state on or before March 24, 1971.

He also stated that no consensus had been undertaken to detect the presence of those who had come to Meghalaya from Bangladesh on or before March 24, 1971 but there are 5,735 Bangladeshi citizens who had entered into the state since 1972 and they are being detected and prosecuted under relevant laws.

The state assembly “also witnessed a heated argument over the issue when the opposition asked whether the 5,735 Bangladeshi citizens were deported. However, Chief Minister maintained that it was the court, which has to decide about the deportation of such nationals, and the government has to follow the court’s orders.” “On May 15, the Meghalaya High Court said Bangladeshi nationals who came to India on or before March 24, 1971 would not be sent back to Bangladesh, but those who came after the stipulated date would have to be deported to the neighbouring country.”

<http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/Regional/RegionalNews.aspx?news=TkVXUzEwMDA2MTMyMg%3d%3d>

Date Accessed: 20.06.2014

(Junty Sharma Pathak)

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EXCLUSION

NHRC issues Notice against Health Ministry over Rising Leprosy cases

(The Business Standard, June 17, 2014)

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued a notice against the health ministry for wrongly claiming that leprosy cases have declined in the country. They have argued that media reports have quoted official figures indicating that there has indeed been a gradual rise in leprosy over a period of three years. Official data shows that 126,800 new cases were reported in 2010-11. The notice was issued to the secretary of the health ministry seeking a report within four weeks.

The NHRC added that new cases are being reported from many states and immediate steps need to be taken to contain the level of elimination to less than one case per 10,000 population at the national level. According the media report, the National Leprosy Elimination Programme (NLEP) was a vertical programme run by specially trained staff under district leprosy officers till 2002-03; however, the situation started worsening as leprosy services were integrated with general health care system, after which only 25 percent of the vertical staff including paramedics, physiotherapist, health educators were retained with the NLEP.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/nhrc-notice-to-health-ministry-over-rising-leprosy-cases-114061700637_1.html

Date Accessed: 17.06.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

CONNECTIVITY

Government to expedite rail projects to enhance coal movement

(*Exim News Service, June 15, 2014*)

To enhance power generation in the country, the government has decided to fast-track three critical coal connectivity projects in a bid which are as follows:

- Tori-Shivpur (44 km) Shivpur-Kathautia (53 km) railway line in North Karanpura in Jharkhand
- Jharsuguda-Barpalli-Sardega railway line (53 km) in Lb Valley, Odisha
- Bhupdevpaur-Korichapan-Dharamjaigarh (180 km) in Mand-Raigarh coalfield in Chhattisgarh

The Railways would help transport over 300 million tonnes of coal, as per an official. The total cost of the projects sums up to more than Rs 7,000 crore. They are expected boost power production in the country as well as help save crucial foreign exchange by reducing the ever-growing need for imported coal. Railway has also committed to complete the three crucial rail link projects by 2016.

In addition, a multidisciplinary Project Monitoring Unit is being formed with representatives from the Railways, Ministry of Coal and Departments of Revenue and Forest, and the state governments concerned for better coordination.

<http://www.eximin.net/NewsDetails.aspx?name=76078>

Date Accessed: 18.6.2014

(Shruti Issar)

EDUCATION

New RTE norms for minority institutions in Karnataka

(*The New Indian Express, June 14, 2014*)

The Karnataka state government has decided to alter the norms for educational institutions to make them eligible as linguistic or religious minority institutions for the implementation of Right to Education (RTE) Act in primary education.

The state Cabinet is going to amend the existing rules for any school or academic institution run by the minority communities to attain the status of minority institution. A proposed new rule states that, "if the number of students belonging to the community that runs the institution is not less than 25 per cent of its strength, it can be considered as a minority institution." According to the existing law at least 75 per cent of the students should be from the concerned minority community, for the school to attain the status of minority institution, to get exemption from the RTE Act. As per the amendment, such institutions will be free from the compulsory allotment of 25 per cent of seats to students from weaker sections whose fee will be paid by the government. The decision to change the rule was made in the wake of the High Court issuing a stay order against the state government's earlier rule. The court had asked the state to bring a new legislation.

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/New-RTE-Norms-for-Minority-Institutions/2014/06/14/article2280020.ece>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Anjana John)

There are no quick fixes for existing government school system

(Dhir Jhingran, *Hindustan Times*, June 23, 2014)

With the change of government at the centre, one of the biggest challenges for them is the revamping of the government school system. The initiatives of the last government like Right to Education and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan made considerable improvements in school infrastructure, teacher availability and school enrolments in the past decade but the quality of education has remained stagnant over the years.

The nine areas which need to be addressed on priority basis for realization of quality education for all are:

1. Enhance funding for school education.
2. Promote a strong focus on student learning.
3. Invest in continuous teacher professional development.
4. Strengthen educational administration and school monitoring to make it more responsive to the demands of RTE.
5. Foster initiatives for strong school leadership
6. Include at least one pre-primary class as a part of every primary school.
7. The SSA needs to change its focus from 'one-size-fits-all' approach to one where the diversity and differences in state needs are considered.
8. Put in place policies and systems that ensure that teachers are posted to schools that need them.
9. Strong political commitment to the agenda of school reform and transparent, accountable governance.

The government school system needs more than quick fixes and it is important that the reformation of the system is high on the list of agenda of the new government.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/comment/analysis/there-are-no-quick-fixes-for-the-existing-government-school-system/article1-1232398.aspx>

Date Accessed: 23.06.2014

(Simi Sunny)

TRANSPORT

E-rickshaws could cut emissions but need new regulations: environmentalists

(*The Hindu*, June 17, 2014)

The article reports on the need for environmental and road safety regulations for e-rickshaws. Environmentalists have argued that with appropriate regulatory mechanisms for disposal and charging of batteries e-rickshaws could help reduce pollution. Apart from this, air pollution and transport policy experts have noted that there is a need to ensure safety of passengers in e-rickshaws by creating dedicated lanes for non-motorised vehicles.

Vivek Chattopadhyay, Deputy Programme Manager at Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)'s Air Pollution Control Unit pointed out that e-rickshaws are currently flouting the law. "The Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI) which certifies vehicles exempts only vehicles operating with batteries of less than 250 Watt and vehicles which run at speeds at less than 25 km per hour. There is research that shows assemblers have installed batteries of over 650 Watt...It is the responsibility of manufacturers and assemblers to register with ARAI, or if these are non-motorised then they should be registered with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi."

B.I. Singhal, Director General of Institute of Urban Transport, has also argued that the environment benefits of e-rickshaws were still being debated, noting that most of the battery-operated rickshaws are plugging into coal-based sources of power for charging. He said that "Running these in a safe and environment-friendly fashion will require a new regulation and proper implementation of the norms."

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-newdelhi/erickshaws-could-cut-emissions-but-need-new-regulations-environmentalists/article6121583.ece>

Date Accessed: 19.06.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

ENERGY

Rajasthan govt to amend wind energy policy

(*Deccan Herald*, June 17, 2014)

Rajasthan cabinet approved the amendments to the 'Wind Energy Policy, 2012' introduced by the erstwhile Congress government. The amendments will allow setting up wind energy plants having 400 MW capacities annually, and bring investment of Rs. 2,500 crore to the state. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Rajendra Rathore said, "Wind energy has a huge potential in Rajasthan. The Cabinet has approved the amendments to the Policy for Promoting Generation of Electricity from Wind, 2012."

After the amendments, discoms can buy wind power on preferential rates set by the State Electricity Regulatory Commission instead of competitive tender process, abiding by the limits set by the Renewable Purchase Obligation till 2015-16. The Cabinet also approved a proposal related to allowing wind energy producers for selling power to other states under the rules and regulations provided for open access.

A committee has been formed by state Cabinet to review the provisions of the allotment of government land for setting up wind energy plants. "The committee will consider options related to transfer of wind power plants from government land to private land. It will work to promote private landholders to set up wind energy plants on private land," Rathore said.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/414341/raje-govt-amend-wind-energy.html>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Jeet Singh)

India to adopt uniform licensing for gas, oil exploration

(Ankur Paliwal, *Down to Earth*, June 18, 2014)

The Indian petroleum minister, Dharmendra Pradhan during the recent World Petroleum Congress in Moscow said that India will soon amend the existing policies for oil and gas exploration to encourage foreign investment and bring in a uniform licensing policy (ULP) to facilitate production of all forms of hydrocarbons under a single policy regime.

"Currently, separate contracts are awarded under different policies like New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) for oil and gas blocks, and Coal Bed Methane (CBM) policy for CBM blocks. Industry has been arguing that exploration becomes difficult when there is overlapping of resources in certain blocks, and there are separate contractual conditions. ULP proposes to bring uniformity in contractual provisions for exploration and production of all kinds of hydrocarbon resources. Around 70 per cent of the existing Indian basins remain largely under-explored."

The uniform licensing will facilitate increased production and also hasten the pace of domestic exploration and production at a time when India's energy demand is expected to double by 2035.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/india-adopt-uniform-licensing-gas-oil-exploration>

Date Accessed: 20.06.2014

(Simi Sunny)

ENVIRONMENT

CO2 Emissions from Transport to Double in ASEAN by 2050

(Ankita Saxena, *Down To Earth*, June 15, 2014)

According to a report published by the International Energy Agency (IEA), the share of carbon emissions from transport in ASEAN countries- Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Brunei- is likely to double by 2050.

The report titled 'A Study of Long-Term Transport Action Plan for ASEAN', which was published in April this year, aims at providing policy recommendations for reducing carbon emission levels from transport in ASEAN up to 0.33 tonnes per capita in 2015. The recommendations for this purpose include switching to cleaner fuels, increasing the prevalence of public transport and introduction of improved technology for public and non-motorised transport. Moreover, the report stresses that a multi-stage, multi-sectoral cooperation is required focusing on secondary and tertiary cities, which will be the main areas of growth leading up to 2050.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), greenhouse emissions have to be reduced by 80 percent if the global climate is to be stabilised by restricting the rise in temperature to 2°C by 2050.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/co2-emissions-asean-transport-sector-will-double-2050-warns-energy-agency>

Date Accessed: 17.06.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

34% of Kerala's potable water contaminated

(Viju B, *The Times of India*, June 16, 2014)

The article reports on the issue of contaminated potable water in Kerala despite sufficient fund allocations under various drinking and sanitation schemes. The latest Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report has revealed that 34% of the total water sources tested by Kerala Water Authority (KWA) were contaminated with heavy presence of iron, fluoride, saline, nitrates, deadly heavy metals like arsenic, and bacteria.

"In the state level sanctioning committee (SLSC) meeting, the principal secretary (water resources) in 2010 had suggested to cover 1,018 water quality-affected habitations within two years in order to free such habitations from any contamination." The committee had sanctioned seven schemes costing Rs 38.20 crore during 2008-09 to 2011-13, of which none were implemented.

CAG Audit analysis revealed that "only 30% of the total rural population of 2.55 crore had access to potable drinking water." The CAG has recommended that the KWA should prepare a comprehensive rolling plan for according priority to complete the schemes

http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/34-of-states-potable-water-contaminated/articleshow/36639337.cms?fb_action_ids=10201793707955992&fb_ac

Date Accessed: 19.06.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

A quarter of India's land is turning into desert: environment minister

(Reuters, June 18, 2014)

The environment minister, Prakash Javadekar has noted that about a quarter of India's land is turning to desert and degradation of agricultural areas is becoming a severe problem, the situation is potentially threatening food security in the world's second most populous country.

The article reports that "India occupies just 2 per cent of the world's territory but is home to 17 per cent of its population, leading to over-use of land and excessive grazing. Along with changing rainfall patterns, these are the main causes of desertification."

"Land degradation - largely defined as loss of productivity - is estimated at 105 million hectares, constituting 32 per cent of the total land.

According to the Indian Space Research Organization (Isro) that prepared a report on desertification in 2007, about 69 per cent of land in the country is dry, making it vulnerable to water and wind erosion, salinization and water logging.

Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are among the most arid. These are some of the cotton and rapeseed growing states of India."

<http://www.im4change.org/latest-news-updates/a-quarter-of-indias-land-is-turning-into-desert-environment-minister-says-4673183.html>

Date Accessed: 19.06.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

LAW AND JUSTICE

CIC asks Gujarat HC to reveal how it monitors lower courts

(Times of India, June 19, 2014)

D Rajagopalan, the chief information commissioner (CIC) has asked the Gujarat high court to furnish information under the Right to Information Act pertaining to its system for monitoring the lower judiciary.

"The applicant, Kalpeshkumar Gupta, filed a query under the RTI Act on June 22, 2012, asking the public information officer of the high court for details of the monitoring system on issues like status of pending cases, periodicity and use of information technology in monitoring. The PIO, as well as the appellate authority, had said that this information didn't fall within the definition of information under the RTI Act."

The CIC in another case had asked the high court "not to interpret RTI laws on its own." In an earlier appeal, the CIC had asked the HC to furnish information on provisions of leave and days of judicial work undertaken by HC judges, in response the HC refused by citing the law, but the CIC intervened and said, "Gujarat high court has been entitled to form rules under the RTI Act, which is obviously for the purpose of better implementation of the law. The high court does not have power to take any decision about interpretation of the section mentioned in the Act."

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/UPs-drought-plan-deficient-on-power-seeds/articleshow/36366592.cms>

Date Accessed: 19.06.2014

(Ashwin Varghese)

China border, sets aside Rs 5,000 cr

(Vijaita Singh, *The Indian Express*, June 20, 2014)

“The NDA government plans to spend Rs 5,000 crore to encourage villagers come and settle in areas along the border with China in Arunachal Pradesh.” “While Rs 24,000 crore has already been earmarked to develop border roads and border outposts for the security forces, around Rs 5,000 crore extra money would be spent on measures to encourage people to settle in the border areas.”

“A senior official asserted that the Centre intends to use this amount only for developing civic facilities such as schools, healthcare and power-sector for villagers. Due to lack of infrastructure and other amenities, border population along China has been pushed at least 50 kilometres away with people abandoning their homes and settling in the foothills.”

Minister of State (Home) Kiren Rijiju, who also belongs to Arunachal Pradesh, stated that he is committed to developing the disputed bordering areas with China and the MHA will approach the Finance Ministry for a special package to develop infrastructure in those areas. In an earlier interview, Rijiju had stated that “The negative policy of the past — that the border should be closed, not be accessible to civilians, not be developed — will be done away with. “We have come to the conclusion that we must initiate steps to enhance our capacity, manpower and developmental activities along the border.”

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/centre-plans-to-encourage-arunachal-villagers-to-settle-along-china-border-sets-aside-rs-5000-cr/>

Date Accessed: 22.06.2014

(Junty Sharma Pathak)

REGIONAL

Jharkhand to Check Migration by Proper Utilisation of MGNREGA funds

(Sudhir Kumar Mishra, *The Telegraph*, June 17, 2014)

In order to check migration from the state, the Jharkhand government is making efforts towards optimum utilisation of MGNREGA projects operated within it. According to the rural development minister, K.N. Tripathy, the poor execution of MGNREGA projects is one of the reasons behind migration of labourers from Jharkhand.

He pointed that out of a budgetary provision of Rs 2000 crore, only Rs. 800 crore were utilised in the previous fiscal year. In the current financial year 1,650 crore has been allocated considering the state's inability to use these funds. However, the cut in allocation is not to be taken as a hostile step from the Centre since it indicated no aversion to revising the budgetary provisions in case there were positive outcomes in the state. A total of Rs. 200 crore have been utilised so far.

Tripathy assured that directions have been given to officials to set a target of at least Rs 1,000 crore to be used by October end. Moreover, the labour department has recently set up special camps in various parts of the state to find on-the-spot solutions to people's problems.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140617/jsp/jharkhand/story_18519825.jsp#.U5_dyvmSyaI

Date Accessed: 17.06.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Centre to Transform Eastern states into Organic Farming Hub

(*Times of India*, June 16, 2014)

Aiming at development of north-eastern states, the central government is planning to transform Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and eastern Uttar Pradesh into an organic farming-hub. As the Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh has stated, this is going to expand opportunities for millions of farmers for earning more in the region. The north eastern region has been considered to have immense potential for organic farming. He added further that the government aims at strengthening rural and village economy through this initiative.

Under this proposed project, soil health cards will be distributed amongst farmers to increase production by using the correct seeds and fertilizers.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/environment/flora-fauna/Centre-plans-to-turn-eastern-states-into-organic-farming-hub/articleshow/36662153.cms>

Date Accessed: 17.06.2014

(Pallavi Ghosh)

Odisha hikes tax rate on liquor, petrol

(*Business Standard*, June 17, 2014)

Odisha has proposed to hike tax rates on liquor as well as petrol and diesel while pegging the state's overall budget outlay at Rs 80,139.58 crore for 2014-15. The budget outlay for 2014-15 is 33% higher than Rs 60,303 crore in 2013-14.

The state government has proposed to raise the tax rate which will fetch additional revenue of Rs 375 crore per annum. It has proposed:

- To raise the tax rate on liquor from 20% to 25%
- To raise the tax rate on petrol and diesel from 18% to 20%.

“The empowered committee of state finance ministers has recommended minimum tax rate of 20 per cent on petrol and diesel, Further, the price of petrol and diesel being lower than the prevailing price in most other states, the increase in the rate will bring parity with the neighbouring states,” said Finance Minister Pradip Amat in his Budget speech.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/odisha-to-raise-tax-rate-on-liquor-petrol-diesel-114061701106_1.html

Date Accessed: 18.6.2014

(Shruti Issar)

West Bengal plans rehab scheme for sex workers

(Outlook Magazine, June 13, 2014)

The West Bengal government has announced a scheme by which sex workers would be rehabilitated by giving them alternative means of livelihood. The scheme christened 'Muktir Alo' (Ray of Freedom) has been designed for sex workers who are willing to opt for it. Those registering under the scheme will be given house rent and transport allowance during the training period of six months.

West Bengal Women Welfare minister Shashi Panja said that the proposed scheme would help sex workers to return to the mainstream society.

<http://www.outlookindia.com/news/article/West-Bengal-Planning-Rehab-Scheme-for-Sex-Workers/844453>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Priority ration cards to replace BPL cards in Kerala

(The Hindu, June 17, 2014)

The below the poverty line (BPL) and above the poverty line (APL) ration cards will be replaced by ‘priority’ and ‘non-priority’ ration cards respectively when new ration cards (as authorized under the National Food Security Act 2013) are introduced in Kerala shortly. Thereafter, the eldest woman above the age of 18 years in the family will have ownership of the ration card. If there are no women above 18 years in the family, the eldest male member in the house will be assigned as the temporary owner of the ration card. Families with priority ration cards will receive rice at Rs.3 per kg and wheat at Rs.2 per kg through from the ration shops. At the same time, the non-priority ration card holders will receive rice and wheat at the current APL rate.

The State will have 48 per cent households with priority ration cards as per the census figures and also there will be a slight dip in the total quantity of rice and wheat provided since it will be on a per person basis under the new system. The Civil Supplies Department is aiming to supply the new ration cards by November this year.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/priority-ration-cards-to-replace-bpl-cards/article6120584.ece?homepage=true>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Anjana John)

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Female mutilation a means of male power over women: UN

(Robert Evans, *Reuters*, June 16, 2014)

This article highlights the growing concern regarding the practice of female genital mutilation practiced widely in African and Muslim countries. According to the U.N. human rights chief Navi Pillay, the practice (which consists of the excision of the clitoris) is a means for men to maintain control of women and needs to be eradicated.

Even if a current global campaign against the practice, dubbed FGM continued at its current level of success, it would be 60 years until the total of well over 125 million women and girls now affected was reduced by half, she said.

"FGM is a form of gender-based discrimination and violence. It is a violation of the right (of women and girls) to physical and mental integrity," Pillay told a gathering on the issue at the UN Human Rights Council.

According to UNICEF, as of 2013, 98 percent of women and girls in Somalia, 96 percent in Guinea and in Egypt 91 percent were victims of FGM - often carried out by other female family members with no medical training. Many girls are in precarious health as a result of the operation.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/06/16/us-health-fgm-idINKBNOER1XF20140616>

Date Accessed: 17.6.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

Fewer N-bombs, but refinement on

(Fredrik Dahl, *The Asian Age*, June 17, 2014)

This article highlights the findings of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) think-tank regarding global nuclear armament. According to their annual report, nuclear states are modernising their nuclear arsenals and appear determined to keep sizeable numbers of weapons for the future.

The findings come five years after US President Barack Obama set out a vision of a world without nuclear weapons making clear just how distant that goal remains.

While there has been a steady decline in the number of nuclear warheads in the world over the past five years, nine countries still had a total of 16,300 such weapons in early 2014 down by around 5.6 per cent from the previous year of which some 4,000 were operational. According to the findings, the pace of reductions has also slowed down compared with the previous decade.

Furthermore, United States and Russia together hold about 93 per cent of the world's nuclear weapons, while North Korea had the fewest weapons.

The United States, Russia, France, Britain and China are the five officially recognised nuclear weapons states. Non-nuclear weapon states such as India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea often criticise the five for not sufficiently living up to their part of the central bargain of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), designed to prevent the spread of atomic arms.

<http://www.asianage.com/international/fewer-n-bombs-refinement-392>

Date Accessed: 17.6.2014

(Divashri Mathur)

SOUTH ASIA

India poorest in South Asia after Afghanistan: Oxford study

(*Hindu Business Line*, June 16, 2014)

A poverty estimation study titled Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2014 by Oxford University states that India is home to over 340 million destitute people and is the second poorest country in South Asia after strife-torn Afghanistan. Further, forty per cent of all poor in 49 countries live in India, mostly in rural areas.

The researchers classified one-half of all the poor in 49 countries as destitute by using MPI 2014, which identified a person as 'multi-dimensionally poor' if he or she is deprived in one-third or more of 10 indicators, such as severe malnutrition, losing two children, and defecating in open. The Oxford analysis of multi-dimensional poverty reduction in India was done using National Family Health Survey datasets from 2005.

In South Asia, Afghanistan had the highest level of destitution at 38 per cent, followed by India at 28.5 per cent. Interestingly, India's immediate neighbours Bangladesh and Pakistan had much lower levels of destitution at 17.2 per cent and 20.7 per cent respectively.

The study placed Afghanistan as the poorest country in South Asia, with 66 per cent (based on 2010-11 data) of its people being MPI poor, followed by India with 54 per cent (2005-06), Bangladesh (2011) with 51 per cent, Pakistan (2012-13) and Nepal (2011) at 44 per cent, Bhutan at 27 per cent, and Sri Lanka and the Maldives at 5 per cent.

The researchers also named Bihar as the poorest region among 49 countries, followed by South Afghanistan. The report points out that the poorest eight large Indian States were home to more MPI poor than the 28 poorest African countries, while admitting that India's data were from 2005-06 and needed an update, whereas those for the 25 African countries were more recent.

In a positive, the study recognized that India reduced multi-dimensional poverty faster than income poverty.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-is-poorest-in-south-asia-after-afghanistan-oxford-varsity-study/article6120424.ece>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Deepti Somani)

Bangladesh allows transit of food grains to NE

(*The Morung Express*, June 12, 2014)

In a major policy change, Bangladesh will now allow India to ferry food grains to the landlocked north eastern states using its territory and infrastructure.

The Bangladesh government has under a special transit facility agreed to transport 10,000 tonnes of food grain for Tripura via its territory. Following a series of diplomatic and other parleys, the Bangladesh government issued necessary orders for carrying of food grains, mainly rice and wheat, which is likely to start within a month. After Tripura, food grains would be ferried through Bangladesh for other north eastern states, including Mizoram, Manipur and southern Assam, to save time and costs, besides ensuring certainty.

Due to shortage of rail wagons, inadequate storage facilities and various other bottlenecks, the north eastern states suffer from poor supply of food grains for most part of the year, especially during the monsoon. For ferrying essentials, goods and heavy machinery from abroad and other parts of the country, India has for long been asking Bangladesh land, sea and rail access to the northeast.

Officials stated that the Food Corporation of India (FCI) had initiated the process to transport food grains and essentials using the Bangladeshi river port in eastern Bangladesh and the roadways connected to the north eastern states.

The FCI had earlier floated tenders to select Bangladeshi transporters. After a series of diplomatic and administrative negotiations involving various Bangladeshi ministries and India's food, finance, shipping and external affairs ministries, the long-pending matter was settled recently. Earlier, in 2012, Bangladesh had allowed India's state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) to ferry heavy machinery, turbines and cargo through Ashuganj river port in southern Tripura.

The FCI would carry the food grains via Bangladesh in association with the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI). Indian and Bangladeshi waterways connect West Bengal and Assam. The IWAI and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) are operating vessels on these routes.

<http://www.morungexpress.com/regional/116924.html>

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Deepti Somani)

AFRICA

30 million African children missing primary school: UN report

(The Huffington Post, June 17, 2014)

According to a recent U.N. review, about 30 million primary school-aged children in sub-Saharan Africa are not going to school, partly because of poverty and conflict. It also states that the progress on getting them back to school has been hindered. Based on a couple of reports published by UNICEF and the statistics arm of UNESCO, the situation is especially alarming in West and Central Africa. The U.N. Millennium Development goals made primary education for every child a priority in 2000, and substantial progress was made through 2007, the reports said. But since then things have not moved. Distances to schools and parents inability to meet the expenses of school are major factors which cause this situation.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20140617/af--africa-education/?utm_hp_ref=world&ir=world

Date Accessed: 18.06.2014

(Anjana John)

