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- India Ranks 18th on Most Desirable Place to Work; US on Top
- Government Eases more Environmental Rules, Makes Project Execution Easier

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Surrogacy and Policy in India



Source: The Hindu

*Compiled by RGICS
Jawahar Bhawan, New Delhi
Issue Coordinator : Ms. Shruti Issar*

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Key Message

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Surrogacy and Policy in India

Introduction

India, over the years has emerged as a preferred destination for surrogacy. The use of technology to assist reproduction has led to the emergence of a booming ‘surrogacy industry’ in the country because surrogacy in India is relatively inexpensive. Moreover, in the absence of a structured legal framework, ‘renting - a- womb’ is easy and efficient. However, surrogacy involves several complicated legal, social and ethical issues which need to be debated, clarified and understood. In this context, the likely introduction of the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill in the Winter Session of Parliament presents an important opportunity for establishing a rights based legal framework on surrogacy in India.

Understanding Surrogacy

Surrogacy is a method of assisted reproduction whereby a woman agrees to carry and give birth to a child for those who cannot biologically bear a child of their own. The two predominant forms of surrogacy include traditional/ genetic surrogacy and gestational surrogacy.

In **traditional surrogacy**, the surrogate mother is either artificially inseminated with the sperm of the intended father (sperm donor) or has sexual intercourse with the intended father. The surrogate's own egg is used, thus she is the genetic mother of the resulting child. Traditional surrogacy is also known as ‘Partial’ or ‘Genetic’ surrogacy. The genetic relationship between the surrogate and the intended child complicated genetic surrogacy, as it legally provided the surrogate with parental rights. This meant that if the surrogate changed her mind about keeping the baby following delivery, she had a right to.

In a **gestational surrogacy**, the surrogate mother is not genetically related to the child. Gestational surrogacy was made possible through the development of in vitro fertilization (IVF) in the late 1970’s. Gestational surrogacy only requires the surrogate’s womb, allowing for the use of the intended mother’s egg, or the egg of a donor. Eggs are extracted from the intended mother or egg donor and mixed with sperm from the intended father or sperm donor in vitro. The embryos are then transferred into the surrogate’s uterus. Gestational surrogacy is also known as ‘Full’ or ‘Host’ surrogacy.

Commercial and Altruistic Surrogacy

Surrogacy per se is not a recent practice of human reproduction. Traditionally, ‘a surrogate mother used to be a woman who substituted the wife and bore a child for the couple either consensually or coercively with or without a commercial transaction’. Since surrogacy involved sex outside marriage, ‘it evoked various moral apprehensions and hence remained clandestine’ (Banerjee; 2012).

However, with technological advancement it became possible to have a legitimate offspring without conjugal relations, making surrogacy morally and socially acceptable. The use of technology has also led to the move from altruistic to commercial surrogacy.

Altruistic surrogacy is where a surrogate mother agrees to gestate a child for intended parents without being compensated monetarily in any way. In other words, this is in effect a surrogacy free of any economic transactions and based on good will/ personal relations. **Commercial surrogacy** is an option in which intending parent offers a financial incentive to secure a willing surrogate. Commercial surrogacy is a controversial method of conception because people, governments and religious groups have questioned the ethics of involving money in a child’s birth (Anu et al; 2013).

Surrogacy Timeline



Source: Compiled from various sources

Surrogacy as an Industry

Critics of commercial surrogacy have questioned the need for India to promote the use of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART). It has been pointed out that for the State, the fertility of its population has arguably been a “problem”, where it strived to “control” it and later to stabilise it. Given its concentrated approach towards tackling the population issue, whether through coercion or through a policy of incen-

tives-disincentives, it is surprising that it looks positively towards ARTs (Banerjee; 2012, John and Qadeer; 2009). John and Qadeer point out that infertility constitutes a small segment of domestic priorities, with the incidence of total infertility in India estimated at 8 to 10%. Only about 2% of Indian women suffer from “primary” infertility which is amenable ART alone. Moreover, it is further reported that among the cases of women who come for ART treatment, barely 1% require surrogacy assistance.

It is in this context that the transnational nature of surrogacy has been highlighted. Transnational commercial gestational surrogacy is a burgeoning billion dollar industry that combines technological expertise and lower cost of hiring Indian women as surrogates (Majumdar; 2013).

The growth of ‘reproductive tourism’ in India is linked to several reasons. These include ‘high quality low-cost ART services provided by largely English speaking doctors; low cost of women willing to be surrogates; and, permissive laws, thus giving rise to the ART industry of which commercial gestational surrogacy is a part’ (Law Commission of India 2009).

A U.N.-backed study in July 2012 estimated the surrogacy business at more than \$400 million a year, with over 3,000 fertility clinics across India. Several towns have become popular for their success in surrogacy. The Akanksha clinic in Anand is one among these, giving the small town in Gujarat state the reputation as India’s “surrogacy capital” (Bhalla and Thapliyal; 2013).

As India is among just a handful of countries - including Georgia, Russia, Thailand and Ukraine where women can be paid to carry another's genetic child through a process of in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) and embryo transfer, the proliferation of commercial surrogacy has been at an alarming rate, leading to the need for regulation of ART.

While the exact numbers are not recorded, guess estimates put the number of children born to surrogates at 25,000, with 50 per cent of the clients coming from the West. A report on “Surrogacy Motherhood: Ethical or Commercial?” supported by the Ministry of Women and Child Development noted that 46 per cent of respondents in Delhi, and 44 per cent in Mumbai said they received Rs.3 lakh to Rs.3.99 lakh for being a surrogate mother. Among those interviewed, 68 per cent in Delhi and 78 per cent in Mumbai said they were employed mostly as domestic helps earning more than Rs.3,000 a month (Perappadan; 2014).

The feminist opposition to exploitation of surrogates and the ‘wombs for rent’ trend also makes a cause for regulation of ART. Critics have pointed to social, medical and economical issues with regards to the unregulated use of ART. The use and abuse of economically disadvantaged women as surrogates, lack of standardized compensation for them, major portion of compensation being paid to the clinics and not the surrogates form the crux of the economic critique. It is also argued that commercial surrogacy does not really involve ‘choice’ and is an outcome of economic necessity often at the cost of the surrogates health and well being. Critics have argued that surrogates must be made aware of the adverse consequences of surrogacy including low rates of success, probability of multiple pregnancies, high possibility of foetal abnormalities and multiple side effects of egg donation. Social issues related to surrogacy include encouragement to regressive notions of “blood” and “legacy” and the overshadowing of cheaper and more progressive options like adoption (Rao; 2012, John and Qadeer; 2009).

Surrogacy Legislation in India

The government in India has sought to regulate commercial surrogacy in India since 2000 with the publication of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Guidelines in 2002. In 2005, ICMR revised the 2002 draft and finalized the ‘National Guidelines for Accreditation, Supervision and Regulation of ART Clinics in India’, which are non-binding in nature.

The public debate around legislation for surrogacy can be traced back to 2008 following the difficult case of baby Manji, a Japanese baby girl born through a commercial surrogacy arrangement in Gujarat between a Japanese national who could not have children of their own, an Indian woman who served as a surrogate and a Gujarati in vitro fertilisation (IVF) clinic. The ambiguous status of surrogacy in Japan, as in India, complicated the return of the baby back to her “home” country – thereby creating a stateless person (Majumdar; 2013).

However, since 2008, there has been a serious attempt to introduce an Act to regulate the use of ART in India. The Assisted Reproductive Technology draft Bill was drafted by ICMR and put forward in 2008 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare during the UPA regime. The draft was revised in 2010 and at present the government seeks to introduce the Bill in the Winter Session of the Parliament.

Key Features of the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) Regulation Bill 2010

- Establishes a National Advisory Board for Assisted Reproductive Technology to regulate Assisted Reproductive Technology in India.
- A woman acting as surrogate mother in India cannot be less than 21 or over 35 years. Also, she cannot give more than five live births, including her own children.
- No surrogate mother shall undergo embryo transfer more than three times for the same couple.
- Defines “couple” as two persons living together and having a sexual relationship that is **legal** in India.
- If a surrogate mother is married, the consent of her spouse is mandatory.
- Only Indian citizens can be considered for surrogacy. No ART bank or clinic can send an Indian citizen for surrogacy abroad. Strict confidentiality has to be maintained about the donor's identity.
- A would-be surrogate mother will be duty bound not to engage in any act that could harm the foetus during pregnancy and the baby after birth.
- Once the Bill gets the assent, it will become binding on a surrogate mother to relinquish all her filial rights over the baby.
- Live-in couples can go for IVF only if the woman cannot biologically bear a child, or it is risky for her to bear one. No ART clinic shall consider conception by surrogacy for patients for whom it may normally be possible to carry a baby to term. A doctor will have to first certify that a conception would lead to undesirable medical implications.
- The commissioning parents will be legally bound to accept the custody of the child irrespective of any congenital abnormality. Refusal will be considered a cognisable offense under this Act.
- No woman can be treated with gametes or embryos derived from the gametes of more than one man or woman during any one treatment cycle. An ART clinic cannot mix semen from two individuals before use.
- The Bill details procedures for accreditation and supervision of infertility clinics.
- Foreign couples including NRIs seeking surrogacy in India will have to submit certificates that their country recognizes surrogacy as legal and also that the surrogate child after birth would get their country's citizenship.

Critique of the Bill

Several women's health and rights based organizations have pointed to the lacunae in the existing draft of the proposed Act to regulate ART. Women's health activists have asked the Centre not to rush into finalising the Bill and instead, hold wider deliberations with women's rights organisations, queer rights, human rights and legal rights organisations across the country.

In its response to the Draft Bill, Sama Resource Group for Women and Health, while appreciating the initiative of the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) for making efforts to regulate the booming Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) industry, in the country, has said the Bill in the present form, is inadequate in protecting and safeguarding the rights and health of women going for IVF techniques, recruited as surrogates and children born through commercial surrogacy (Dhar; 2013).

The Bill has been criticized for its failure to set standards for medical practice and completely ignores the regulation of the third party agents who play pivotal role in arranging surrogates such as surrogacy agents, tourism operators and surrogacy home operators. Critics have also stated that the Bill should clearly list the various health risks and adverse outcomes of these technologies. It should also establish standard pattern of payment to surrogates and not be left to individual clinics and surrogates to decide.

It has also been pointed out that the Bill should permit genetic surrogacy, a simpler, less invasive form of surrogacy and not restrict to the more complicated, expensive and invasive gestational surrogacy. The Bill is also criticized for confining itself to provision of ARTs within a heteronormative framework discriminates towards homosexuals (Dhar; 2013).

Conclusion

Surrogacy, whether altruistic or commercial, raises several socio-economic, medical and legal concerns. For legislation to be effective, there needs to be a shift in focus from the aspects of technology and industry to the ‘languages, economies, kinship and moralities which frame issues of reproductive choice and consent’ (Unnithan; 2013). The state must also explain the rationale behind ‘industry-friendly’ mechanisms that seek to benefit a largely foreign population and make efforts to protect the rights and health of the Indian surrogates. Women, who act as surrogates in India, often come from vulnerable economic backgrounds, leading to their exploitation in terms of low rate of compensation and inadequate medical safeguards. Therefore, any deliberation on surrogacy must take into consideration the voice of the surrogates as active participants in the policy process and not mere bystanders.

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Prepared by:
Divashri Mathur

Macro Economic Dimension of India: Inflation Rates for the Month of August, 2014

General Inflation Rates in Indian States: August, 2014 (%)

States	Rural	Urban	General
All India	8.33	7.04	7.86
Northern Region			
Jammu & Kashmir	7.39	6.16	6.97
Himachal Pradesh	8.15	7.03	7.93
Punjab	8.66	6.25	7.48
Chandigarh	7.15	8.03	7.98
Uttarakhand	8.89	5.57	7.73
Haryana	7.11	6.88	7.01
Delhi	5.72	5.67	5.67
Uttar Pradesh	8.93	7.78	8.84
Western Region			
Rajasthan	9.61	7.27	8.76
Gujarat	7.53	5.96	4.29
Maharashtra	6.78	2.72	8.20
Goa	11.20	8.18	7.19
Lakshadweep	11.33	2.98	18.51
Daman & Diu	8.63	7.56	-0.23
Dadra Nagar & Haveli	7.37	2.75	15.01
Central Region			
Madhya Pradesh	6.87	6.78	6.66
Chattishgarh	10.16	6.60	7.29
Southern Region			
Andhra Pradesh	5.76	4.71	9.87
Karnataka	5.76	4.71	9.87
Kerala	5.97	18.0	3.25
Tamil Nadu	6.45	8.05	6.70
Puducherry	8.13	8.72	7.22
Andaman & Nicobar Island	8.82	3.59	6.40

States	Rural	Urban	General
Northeastern Region			
Arunachal Pradesh	6.44	-	-
Assam	8.69	9.73	8.89
Manipur	2.0	8.23	4.13
Meghalaya	16.77	9.10	15.03
Mizoram	13.81	5.99	9.56
Nagaland	14.55	8.91	12.32
Tripura	22.29	15.70	20.42
Sikkim	8.69	8.56	8.66
Eastern Region			
Bihar	10.38	8.16	10.06
Jharkhand	6.43	8.78	9.31
West Bengal	9.35	8.0	7.82
Odisha	11.75	10.09	9.71

Source: State-wise monthly inflation rates are estimated from year on year Consumer Price Index (CPI) data of MOSPI. There is one month time lag in CPI data (New Series 2010=100) provided by MOSPI, Government of India.

Inflation Rates across the states indicate the following

- 18 states have more than All-India inflation rate in their rural sectors
- 18 states have more than All-India inflation rate in their urban sector
- 18 states have more than All-India inflation rate in general
- Tripura has the highest inflation rate in India

The Poor and Rich Gap Growing in India: UN ESCAP

(Asian Age, October 4, 2014)

The gap between the rich and the poor is growing in the Asia-Pacific region, and there has also been an increase in the income inequality in major economies, including India, China and Indonesia as per the report of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UN ESCAP).

The Gini coefficient which is used as a measure of income inequality has increased from the early 1990s and late 2000s from 30.8 to 33.9 in India, 32.4 to 42.1 in China and in Indonesia it has increased from 29.2 to 38.1, as per the report. According to the report the various factors for the widening income gaps are:

- Weaker labour market institutions,
- Inadequate social protection systems,
- Poor-quality of education,
- Inadequate access to credit
- Excessive asset concentration

According to the UN –ESCAP Report the ultra-high net worth individuals (UHNWIs) in these regions indicate that persons with a net worth of \$30 million or more have accounted for 30 per cent of the region's income in 2012-13. "This shows that wealth concentration is a major characteristic of income inequality. The region had around 49,000 persons (0.001 per cent of Asia-Pacific population in 2013) classed as UHNWIs, with about \$7.5 trillion of net wealth in 2012-13," the report stated.

The Report states that in this region the poorest 20 per cent of the population accounts for less than 10 per cent of the national income. The UN-ESCAP study has been carried out for about 40 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

<http://www.asianage.com/business/poor-and-rich-gap-growing-india-says-report-200>

Date Accessed: 05.10.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

India Ranks 18th on Most Desirable Place to Work; US on Top

(The Indian Express, October 7, 2014)

Among the G20 nations, India has been ranked the 18th most desirable place to work even though about 70-80 percent Indians are ready to work abroad. India is desired as a work destination because of its good work-life balance, job security, learning, career development and work appreciation.

The Boston Consulting Group, total jobs.com and the Network published the report. It further identified United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and Switzerland as the top five places to work in the world.

US and Europe are favorable work destination as compared to Asia because the perceived difficulty of learning the local language. However, the report also notes that Asian countries are recapturing the lost workforce.

"Globally, one in every five participants already has international work experience and almost 64 per cent said they would be willing to go to another country for work." People are willing to move to another country for work to broaden their life experiences.

Politically unstable countries have more people willing to work abroad. 97 percent Pakistanis are ready to leave home for work in a different country. While over 94 percent French and Dutch respondents were willing to work abroad, only a third of US respondents say they would consider the idea.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/india-ranks-18th-on-most-desirable-place-to-work-us-on-top/>

Date Accessed: 7.10.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

Government Eases more Environmental Rules, Makes Project Execution Easier

(Somesh Jha, Business Standard, October 9, 2014)

In order to make developer's life easier, Union Environment Ministry, on Thursday, October 9th, 2014, barred the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), which is a group which recommends projects for environment clearance from commissioning any additional impact assessment studies. As per the revision of norms, EAC cannot ask a project developer for additional environmental studies while already appraising a proposal. Rather, they have ordered the EAC to look into all these concerns at the time of the initial stages only (while granting TOR) and "ensure that no fresh issues are raised (during appraisal) unless it turns out that the information provided by the project proponent at the time of scoping was wrong and misleading".

In addition, the ministry has also stated that in rare cases, where seeking additional information beyond TORs becomes "inevitable", the EAC should completely justify this move, besides getting additional studies conducted in a time bound manner.

Environmental studies are considered to be a pre-requisite for every project proponent. They are supposed to take into account all environment concerns related to the project, the basis for granting a green nod. In past there had been several instances where EAC has sent back the proposal seeking more details on how the project proponent

plans to deal with it. For instance, the EAC had sought additional information for Reliance Power's Sasan ultra mega project expansion before granting clearance for the Chhatrasal block. It had asked Reliance for more information on issues such as land use pattern.

"It has been brought to the notice of this ministry that sometimes the EACs during the appraisal process revisit the issue of the site of the project and/or seek additional studies on various issues which do not form part of the Terms of References (TORs). This, besides delaying the whole process, goes against the spirit of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2006," the October 7 ministry order says. According to EIA Notification 2006, a project had to go through several stages before environment clearance is granted.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/govt-eases-more-environmental-rules-makes-project-execution-easier-114100900994_1.html

Date Accessed: 10.10.2014

(Shruti Issar)

Laws Must Keep Pace with Liberalisation

(*Free Press Journal*, October 08, 2014)

After recommending to trash around 323 archaic laws, the Law Commission in its new recommendation has asked the government to immediately update the existing laws to revive the economic growth and accelerate development, lest failure to recognise “symbiotic linkages between law and economy prove very costly to the nation.”

The commission in its latest report submitted to Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad by its chairperson Justice A P Shah, a retired Delhi High Court chief justice says, “Laws and legal structures should keep pace with economic liberalisation to avoid legal gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions causing serious impediments to the process of growth and development.”

It identified 72 obsolete laws for immediate repeal as they unnecessarily create obstacles in the economic growth. This is in addition to 253 irrelevant laws pertaining to trade and commerce, taxes, banking, insurance, land, revenue and energy that it had identified in an earlier report for repeal.

The report says that in fact there are over 700 laws enacted till 2004 that required to be trashed as they have served their purpose. Justice Shah told the minister that the commission is examining another 189 laws to assess the need to repeal or revise them and it would give its recommendations soon.

<http://freepressjournal.in/laws-must-keep-pace-with-liberalisation/>

Date Accessed: 08.10.2014

(Jeet Singh)

India Expected to Emerge Biggest Rice Exporter in 2015

(*Madhvi Sally, The Economic Times*, October 8, 2014)

Anticipating higher demands from Africa and Middle east, India is likely to become the highest exporter of rice—both basmati and non-basmati. Nigeria is expected to import rise ahead of elections as a populist measure.

Managing director of Pattabhi Agro Foods, the country's biggest exporter of non-basmati rice predicts that the export of non-basmati will grow to about 10-11 million tonnes, a level last seen in 2012. All India Rice Exporters Association predicted a rise of 5 percent from the current export of 4 million tonnes of basmati rice.

South India-based exporters of non-basmati rice are waiting for harvesting period to start in 15-20 days in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Tamil Nadu. Trade analysts have said that Andhra Pradesh has also upgraded the quality and performance of their mills.

“Surplus rice stockpiles in the country and improved methods of production have helped position India competitively in the global rice market.” Quoting a \$400 per tonne price for non-basmati rice, India gained an edge over Thailand in African markets as its \$10-15 cheaper compared to Thailand. Moreover, a price of \$360-370 per tonne for white rice was competitive price with rates of Pakistan and Vietnam.

“As of October 1, the central pool had 17.33 million tonnes of rice compared with a requirement of 7.2 million tonnes in buffer and strategic reserves.”

Prices of rice have been falling. “Basmati variety 1509 was being sold at Rs 2,525-2,725 a quintal in Punjab, compared with Rs 3,800-4,100 a quintal a year earlier.” Private traders have been waiting for prices to fall before entering the market.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/agriculture/india-expected-to-emerge-biggest-rice-exporter-in-2015/articleshow/44661771.cms>

Date Accessed: 8.10.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

India likely to Join Asian Infrastructure Bank

(*Sidhartha, Times Of India, October 6, 2014*)

India is expected to join Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as the second largest shareholder after China. This would enable India to ensure that it has a say in running this new multilateral lending institution.

AIIB is being created at China's behest. It is expected to start with an authorised capital of US dollars 50 billion and will boost infrastructure financing in the region. AIIB will provide low cost funds for infrastructure creation in India, which other lenders have failed to do. India may get around 19 percent voting rights in AIIB based on the size of its economy, compared to China's 42 percent.

When China discussed the idea of AIIB, initially, India and Japan had been kept out of the closed door meeting with 16 countries, on the sidelines of the Asian Development Banks (ADB) annual meeting. Subsequently, Chinese president extended an offer to Indian Prime Minister, to join AIIB, on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Brazil. The National Democratic Alliance Government was not favourable to the idea, the mood changed when it was realised that India's neighbours i.e. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka will be shareholders.

The Government feels that, if the existing institutions are unable to or unwilling to intervene on behalf of emerging markets like India, then a new financial institution to intermediate is needed. This has pushed India's decision to join AIIB.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/industry-business/India-likely-to-join-Asian-infrastructure-bank/articleshow/44455632.cms>

Date Accessed: 06.10.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

Corporate Hiring in 2013-14 was Slowest in 3 Years

(*Yoosef kp and Aveek Datta, The Financial Express, October 4, 2014*)

The combined employee strength of the country's largest companies went up by a mere 2 percent year – on-year in 2013-14. This is the slowest growth, in the last three years, reflecting the strain that the economy went through in 2012-13. The aggregate employee count for 185 of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) 500 companies, for whom comparable data are available for the last four financial years was only 2.18 percent higher in financial year 2014 than in financial year 2013.

The individual headcount at some of the largest firms like State Bank of India, Wipro, Steel Authority of India, HDFC Bank and Tata Motors has, in fact, come down. Job creation in fiscal 2014 was a challenge due to sluggish economic growth that impacted businesses across sectors, specially infrastructure and manufacturing. Interestingly, though the rate of growth in the aggregate number of employees added by these companies was very small compared to the previous years, the growth in total employee cost incurred by these companies remained the same. It is believed that Indian companies hired a lot more talent in the second half of fiscal 2013, compared with the same period in fiscal 2014. This may explain why the growth in employee costs is similar between the two financial years. Since the employees hired between October 2012 and March 2013 did not serve for the full fiscal, costs associated with them were lower in financial year 2013, compared to the next fiscal where they were paid for full year.

Over the next 12 to 24 months, new employment generation is expected to come from sectors like infrastructure and manufacturing, rather than financial services and information technology. Over the past few years financial services and information technology firms have been the principal drivers of employment creation in the country.

<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/strains-showing-india-inc-hiring-slowest-in-3-years-up-by-mere-2-in-fy14/1295377>

Date Accessed: 06.10.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

Indian Economy to Grow by 6.4%in 2015-16: World Bank

(**Lalit K. Jha, Livemint & Wall Street Journal, October 7, 2014**)

In its bi-annual report called South Asia Economic Focus report, which was released on 6th October 2014, the World Bank has said that India is set to grow by 6.4% in 2015-16 as against 5.6% in 2014-15. The report also mentions the fact that India produces eighty percent of South Asia's output. The report added that the recovering US market would encourage this growth, as it will provide a market for Indian merchandise and service exports. The Bank maintained that India's growth potential remains high due to favourable demographic, relatively high savings along with policies and efforts to improve skills and education. The report also mentioned that the region's growth prospects are poised to potentially make it the second fastest growing region in the world after East Asia and the Pacific. Other countries in the region are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

According to chief economist for South Asia at the World Bank, Martin Rama, the outlook over the next years for South Asia points towards economic stability and a pick-up in growth with probable risks majorly concerning the fiscal and structural reform side. He also added that future growth would increasingly depend on strong investment and export performance. While the government's business orientation is likely to aid private investment prospects, it is argued that economic reforms will be needed for India to achieve its full long-term growth potential.

Inflation is likely to fall as monetary policy would be switched to inflation targeting, while the current account deficit is expected to widen somewhat as import demand and capital inflows rise. With stronger revenue mobilization, fiscal consolidation is expected to persist. Moreover, oil subsidy burden could decline to 0.6% of GDP if cordial global crude prices persist. However, it is observed that supply chain delays and uncertainty are still major yet under-appreciated constraint to manufacturing.

http://www.livemint.com/Politics/XQ5Z2vg7cEIHgm3sbH3HoK/Indian-economy-to-grow-by-64in-201516-World-Bank.html?utm_source=ref_article

Date Accessed: 07.10.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

Announcement of New Investments in India Grows by 95.4 per cent to Rs. 2,174 Billion

(**Pradnya Deo, Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd., October 07, 2014**)

In the quarter that ended in September 2014, announcement of new investments in India grew by 95.4 per cent year-on-year to Rs. 2,174 billion; which is the highest in the past nine quarters. These were majorly dominated by announcements of investments in the power sector. However, Tamil Nadu had the highest new investments worth Rs. 373.2 billion, highest in the past four years.

In Tamil Nadu, there have been announcements to set up a solar power plant at Rs. 260 billion and a thermal power plant with an investment of Rs. 32 billion. There have also been announcements of a number of industrial projects including a desalination plant and investments in storage and distribution segment. Andhra Pradesh stood second with substantial new investments worth Rs. 339 billion with nearly 170.5 billion (nearly 50 per cent) belonging to the solar energy sector; as the government has signed various Memorandums of Understanding in the sector. Maharashtra was the third state with investments worth Rs. 267.6 billion, including a Rs. 150 billion investment for a dry port in Aurangabad; and another at Wardha. Karnataka saw new investments worth Rs. 126.9 billion, mainly in the steel industry. Uttar Pradesh saw the highest amount of new investments in the quarter in the past four years, at Rs. 126.1 billion including a Rs. 52.8 billion Meja Phase II Thermal Power Project by the state government. In Rajasthan, new investments worth Rs. 125.9 billion were also led by the power sector; including Adani Power announcement to expand the capacity at its Kawai Coal Based Thermal Plant at a cost of Rs. 91 billion. New investments in Telangana were comparatively lower than Andhra Pradesh at Rs. 107.4 billion while Bharat Heavy Electrical Ltd (BHEL) is in talks with the Telangana government for engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) order for the Manuguru Coal Based Thermal Power Project.

However, announcement of new investments in Gujarat was lower in the quarter at Rs. 65.3 billion, in comparison to Rs. 176.5 billion in June 2014. Investments worth Rs. 28.5 billion were seen in the shipping transport infrastructure segment alone.

[http://www.cmie.com/kommon/bin/sr.php?
kall=wclrdhtm&nvd=20141006145118413&nvpc=099000000000&nvtype=INSIGHTS](http://www.cmie.com/kommon/bin/sr.php?kall=wclrdhtm&nvd=20141006145118413&nvpc=099000000000&nvtype=INSIGHTS)

Date Accessed: 07.10.2014
(Kasturi Mishra)

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

1 lakh Villages Earmarked for Organic Farming

(Narendra Dev, *The Statesman*, October 5, 2014)

The Union Agriculture Ministry is planning to launch a mega Organic Farming Scheme. Out of around 6 lakh villages in the country, the government will select 1 lakh villages and at least 50 farmers in each village to launch this scheme. Thus, this scheme would engage at least 50 lakh people.

The Government is planning to converge to the organic farming scheme with the Rs 500 crore Gokul mission. The Union Agriculture Ministry in July 2014 unveiled "Rashtriya Gokul" mission, which aims to financially assist NGOs or people running cow-hostels. It aims at protecting the 'indigenous breed' of cows and even sets aside Rs 150 crore for this during the current financial year to enhance milk productivity.

Under the Organic Farming Scheme the Government will provide all the support needed for organic farming to farmers in North-eastern states and across the country. In fact in the budget the Government had laid emphasis on organic farming with the Centre earmarking Rs 100 crore for organic farming exclusively for the North-east. The government will also seek to create an exclusive marketing institution for the organic farming products.

The Union Agriculture Minister has asked its officials to take steps to complement and optimise the income of people engaged in both organic farming and cattle farming.

<http://www.thestatesman.net/news/80026-1-lakh-villages-earmarked-for-mega-organic-farming.html>

Date Accessed: 05.10.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

SC Panel Suggests Steps to Regulate Government Advertising

(*The Indian Express*, October 7, 2014)

Headed by eminent academician Professor N R Madhava Menon, a three-member Supreme Court panel has suggested a number of measures in order to regulate the expenditure and content of advertisements in the media by governments and politicians. This move has been taken to check the "misuse and abuse" of public money by approving curbs on "politically motivated" advertisements by governments and leaders at the cost of public funds. The panel also comprised of T K Viswanathan, former Secretary General of Lok Sabha and Solicitor General Ranjit Kumar. The committee prepared its guidelines after consulting provisions of various countries and meeting all state governments and political parties.

The court-appointed high powered committee has stated that only pictures and names of the President, Prime Minister, Governors and Chief Ministers should be published in government advertisements without mentioning or using names and pictures of political parties and their office bearers. In addition to that, the panel has said that each ministry and public sector undertaking should declare expenditure on public advertisements; and that this expenditure should be audited by the CAG. The Panel has also maintained that government advertisements should not be used to the advantage of the ruling party and for making attacks on the opposition. A suggestion by the Election Commission that there must be severe restrictions on such advertisements six months prior to elections has also been endorsed by the panel. Another recommendation has been made so as to mandate only a single advertisement, preferably by the Information & Broadcasting Ministry, in respect of commemorative advertisements that are published on birth and death anniversaries of important personalities. The report has suggested the establishment of an implementation committee, headed by either an official for handling complaints or Cabinet Secretary or Secretary Information and Broadcasting Ministry, to maintain a distinction between permissible messages of government from that of political message till a law is enacted.

Based on these recommendations, the SC will issue "substantive guidelines" to be followed by the central and state governments and their agencies such as the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP) and Information departments in states. This move should essentially prevent splurge of the public fund.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sc-panel-suggests-steps-to-regulate-govt-advertising/>

Date Accessed: 07.10.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

GOVERNMENT

20 Lakh Rupees Per Annum To Villages For 'Swachhta Mission'

(Press Information Bureau, October 2, 2014)

Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister of Rural Development and Drinking Water and Sanitation, announced a sum of 20 lakh rupees per annum to be given to every village in the country to achieve the goal of clean India by 2nd October 2019. The money would remain deposited in every Gram Panchayat for cleaning purposes. The Ministries would spend 1,34,000 crore rupees for construction of about 11 crore 11 lakh toilets in the country in five years. The Minister emphasised that technology would be used on a large scale to convert waste in rural India into bio-fertilizer and different forms of energy.

The Swachh Bharat Mission would involve every gram panchayat, panchayat samiti and zila parishad in the country, besides including large sections of rural population, NGOs, Religious leaders and school teachers and students in the country.

Senior Congress leader and former Union finance minister P. Chidambaram contended that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan scheme was "nothing new but Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan" of erstwhile Congress-led UPA Government.

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=110249>

<http://www.firstpost.com/politics/modis-swachh-bharat-abhiyan-nothing-new-upa-scheme-says-chidambaram-1740661.html>

Date Accessed: 03.08.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

EDUCATION

People's Suggestions to be Taken for New Education Policy

(DD News, October 06, 2014)

The Ministry of Human Resource Development is planning to repeal the National Education Policy, 1986. The Minister said that all the past education policies were framed by educationists and academicians, she said for whom such a policy mattered most were never associated.

The Ministry would invite suggestions from students, teachers and parents for the proposed New Education Policy, the process of which will begin from next year, Union Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Zubin Irani said at a function in Guwahati.

"For the New Education Policy, we will go to all the states. We will invite suggestions from students, teachers and parents for it and will discuss with them how this policy should be," Irani said at a function in Guwahati. The government would use all the media -print, electronic and Internet for engaging the society in the process, she said.

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

Date Accessed: 08.10.2014

(Jeet Singh)

HEALTH

Computerised Drug Distribution System Being Devised by the Karnataka Government

(Deccan Chronicle, October 7, 2014)

A report was filed by the Karnataka Drug Logistics and Warehousing Department before the Karnataka High Court stating that a comprehensive computerised drug distribution system was being developed for public health institutions and would be implemented from 2015.

The High Court had taken up a suo motu petition following newspaper reports that hospitals were storing drugs in toilets and ambulance sheds. Some audit objections on excessive procurement, unscientific distribution and storage of drugs in toilets, corridors and ambulances during 2007-2012 was raised by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Corrective measures had been taken by the Karnataka Drug Logistics and Warehousing Department during 2009-2010, which drastically brought down excess procurement of drugs, when they realised that there were some lacunae in the procurement process.

“Various other measures were also taken to prevent waste,” the report stated. A computerised distribution system would be implemented from 2015 to plug the loopholes in drug procurement process.

<http://www.deccanchronicle.com/141007/nation-current-affairs/article/computerised-drug-distribution-system-2015-karnataka>

Date Accessed: 08.10.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

New Law Might Deny Surrogacy for Single Parents and Foreigners

(The Hindu, October 4, 2014)

The Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry is gearing up to table the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (Regulation) Bill 2014 in the coming winter session of Parliament. The spotlight is on whether single parents and foreign nationals will be allowed to have children through surrogates in India.

According to an official, the “predominant” view, during the discussions with legal experts, medical experts and with NGOs working on issues of women, children and health issues, sought to bar single parents and foreign nationals from having children through commercial surrogacy. They argued that absence of regulations promoted trafficking in women and children and that surrogate mothers were treated unjustly with little or no care for their health. The view to disallow foreign nationals is based on concerns over citizenship rights of children born to Indian surrogate mothers as several countries have banned surrogacy and do not recognise the children born through assisted means as their citizens. A small section said that surrogacy could be extended to couples where at least one parent is an Indian national.

The view on barring foreign nationals and single parents is being challenged as it violates the rights of these categories. Indian laws allow inter-country adoptions and the Supreme Court allows for religion and gender-free secular adoptions. It would serve the government better to formulate laws that plug the loopholes in checking exploitation, than denying a group their hopes of having a child.

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/new-law-would-denry-surrogacy-for-single-parents/article6470175.ece>

Date Accessed: 05.08.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

TRANSPORT

Private Participation to be Allowed in the Sale of Railway Tickets

(The Hindu, October 7, 2014)

The Indian Railways will allow public-private partnership in Passenger Reservation System (PRS)-cum-Unreserved Ticketing System terminals to expand the facilities for purchasing tickets.

Presently, e-tickets can be sold only by authorised travel agents while the PRS counters are operated by the Commercial Department of the Ministry. The new reservation centres are slated to be called *Yatri Ticket Suvidha Kendras*. The partnership will only allow authorised agents, who have been providing railway ticketing services of the Indian Railways for at least five years, to become a part of the scheme.

“The licensee will have to set up counters on the pattern and standard at par with the computerised PRS centres of the Indian Railways. However, the private player would have to engage his own staff at his own cost for running such centres. The Railways will supply, free of cost, only PRS tickets rolls,” an official said.

Allowing private participation in the sale of railway tickets may result in passengers having to dig deeper in their pockets, with private players charging a premium for their services.

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/railways-to-allow-private-participation-in-sale-of-tickets/article6476987.ece>

Date Accessed: 07.08.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

ENERGY

Government Targets to Increase Solar Power Capacity 40 fold in 10 Years

(Anupama Airy, Hindustan Times, October 2, 2014)

The Government has set up an ambitious target of growing India's solar power capacity 40-fold in 10 years. In order to achieve this target the Government has decided to tie up with international funding agencies such as World Bank, German Development Bank KfW for multi-billion dollar assistance. Solar power would play an important role in the Government's promise of providing 24x7 power to the entire country.

The total installed power generation capacity of the country is 250,000 mw and the share of solar power is mere 2,500 mw, at present. In order to increase this installed power capacity to 100,000 mw in the coming 10 years it would require an investment of around 6 lakh crore. This would immediately result in doubling up of solar energy to 5,000 mw within 2014-15. This target would be achieved through a long-term partnership with Solar Energy Corporation of India which would focus on three dimensions:

- Supporting ultra mega solar power plants through long tenure financing, beginning with 750 MW in Madhya Pradesh
- large scale 100 MW rooftop decentralised solar power through partnerships with agencies such as Airport Authority of India, Railways and Warehousing Corporation of India;
- By setting up five solar parks.

Government of India has identified states such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Andhra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh have been identified to set up big solar power projects. The Government feels that cheaper capital and a proper solar power policy will attract investors in this field.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/business-news/govt-seeks-multi-billion-dollar-funds-for-solar-power-project/article1-1271162.aspx>

Date Accessed: 05. 10.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

India May Pass China as Biggest Coal Importer

(Sumit Moitra, DNAIndia, October 7, 2014)

As the de-allocation of coal block has taken a threatening shape and looms over India's ability to meet a significant part of the country's energy need, the country could soon overtake China as the world's biggest consumer of imported coal, as predicted by global analysts including Glencore, one of the world's largest traders of coal. India is currently the third-biggest thermal coal importer in the world. As the de-allocated coal blocks are to be taken away from private developers, this will poised India to import more coal. However, on the other hand, China is faced with slowdown in energy consumption coupled with tighter regulations reducing import of low-grade polluting grades of coal.

"Amid weaker Chinese steel demand and lower domestic freight costs, we expect China's import needs to decline, eliminating what had been a key source of growth for the market. We expect global seaborne demand growth to slow considerably, with India the main source of incremental demand going forward," Daniel Rohr, analyst with Morningstar, an investment research and investment management firm, said in a report on October 6th, 2014. Glencore also added that global coal imports in 2014 would drop to 308 million tonne (mt) from 312 mt in 2013 but would again rise to 317 mt in 2015 and this would adversely impact global prices. This is due to the fact that rise in Indian imports wouldn't be able to compensate for the likely drop in Chinese imports as a result of which global trade will fall. Based on this, Morningstar has reduced the long-term metallurgical coal price to \$130 from \$160, factoring in a diminished outlook for Chinese steel demand.

Meanwhile, in its presentation, Glencore said India's coal imports are expected to grow from 170 mt to 180 mt in 2015 and then to 300 mt by 2020. The analysts have taken into account the coal-fired power capacity targets for India. They have also noted current low level of stock of coal lying with the power plants indicating higher imports in coming days. Country's Central Electricity Authority recently said coal stocks at 56 thermal plants have less than 7 days of fuel stock. Moreover, of the 56 stations, 33 had less than four days of stock, CEA noted. Therefore, the impending need for is likely to be filled by imports.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/money/report-india-may-pass-china-as-biggest-coal-importer-2024052>

Date Accessed: 07.10.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

ENVIRONMENT

Indian Ocean Warming to Weaken Monsoon

(Neha Madaan, Times of India, October 3, 2014)

A study by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune Sorbonne University Paris and Fergusson College Pune has found that the warming of the Indian Ocean has been a major contributor to the total global sea surface warming. This ocean warming may have long term effects on the climate such as weakening the South West monsoon and adversely affecting the marine bio diversity. Global ocean surface warming has long term effects on the climate, since it persists for a longer time compared with land temperatures.

The study which was recently published online by the Journal of Climate of the American Meteorological Society shows that these findings are based on analysis of multiple data sets for Indian Ocean, for the past 112 years. The study is part of Indo-French collaboration carried out under the National Monsoon Mission, set up by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

This collaborative research found warming over the Indian Ocean to be happening at a rate faster than any other region of the tropical oceans in the world. Such warming has a potential to alter the strength and course of the monsoon in India.

<http://epaperbeta.timesofindia.com/Article.aspx?eid=31806&articlexml=Indian-Ocean-heating-up-for-over-a-century-03102014012052>

Date Accessed: 05. 10.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

New UN Report Warns of ‘Devastating’ Effects from Ongoing Destruction of Mangrove Forests

(Press Release, *UN News Centre*, September 29, 2014)

On 29 September 2014, in a new report called ‘The importance of mangroves to people: a call to action’, the United Nations Environment Programme(UNEP) has said that deforestation of the planet’s mangroves exceeds global forest loss by a rate of three to five times, and it results in a damage of up to \$42 billion annually. It is also mentioned that the destruction impacts millions of lives and increasingly exposes coastal habitats to risks of devastation from climate change.

The trend of land conversion for aquaculture and agriculture has potentially severe damaging effects on biodiversity, food security and livelihoods of some of the most marginalized coastal communities, especially in the developing countries – where more than ninety per cent of the world’s mangroves are found. UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner noted that mangroves provide ecosystem services worth up to \$57,000 per hectare per year, storing carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere along with providing livelihood to a large number of people. The complex network of mangrove roots help reduce wave energy, limit erosion and form a critical barrier to the dangers posed by the strengthening tropical storms, cyclones and tsunamis which have been assailing coastal communities in recent years due to climate change. There, mangrove destruction makes neither economic nor ecological sense. By quantifying in economic terms the value of the ecosystem services provided by mangroves and their role in climate regulation, the report aims to encourage policymakers to use the financial mechanisms and guidelines to better ensure the sustainable management of mangroves - including the creation of a Global Mangrove Fund, encouraging mangrove conservation and restoration through carbon credit markets, and promoting economic incentives as a source of local income from mangrove protection, sustainable use, and restoration activities.

The Indian coast itself boasts of approximately 700,000 hectares of total mangrove cover. Based on this report, one can assess the relevance of this cover and hence, a need arises to stop illegal activities, like the building of artificial bunds within mangroves for crab farming and fishing in Airoli, Navi Mumbai, and various other instances throughout India. Even Odisha, which has India's richest mangroves in terms of biodiversity and comes second in the world, lost 9 sq km of mangrove forest in 2011-12. The prawn mafia is to be blamed for the occurrences. For this, adequate laws further strengthening the protection mechanism for mangroves are required; so as to sustain India’s cover, which has proven useful in protecting Indian villages against cyclones’ wrath.

http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48931#.VDUI_ktMH1q

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-9-sq-km-of-india-s-most-biodiverse-mangroves-lost-in-2-years-in-odisha-2001399>

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/Airoli-mangroves-continue-to-die-due-to-illegal-dams-hacking/articleshow/44424696.cms>

Date Accessed: 08.10.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

LAW AND JUSTICE

System Failure Resulting In a Large Number Of Under Trials

(*Frontline*, October 17, 2014)

Former Chief Justice of India, R.M. Lodha, said that the delivery of justice had become a punishment in itself and that there were long delays in the criminal justice delivery system. He also referred to the disproportionately large number of under trials lodged in prisons

The report “Prison Statistics India 2012” by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), released in September 2013, stated that 66.2 per cent of the inmates were under trials. Moreover, 344 women convicts with their 382 children and 1,226 women under trials with their 1,397 children were lodged in various prisons in the country. Uttar Pradesh had the largest number of under trials followed by Punjab.

A report titled “Arrears and Backlogs: Creating additional Judicial (Wo) manpower”, released in July 2014 by the Law Commission of India, gives reasons for untimely delivery of justice. It points to the huge backlog of cases, which the current judge strength is inadequate to dispose of. The report recommends recruiting of judges on a priority basis, better infrastructure, more support staff, and the reduction of judicial delay. There is also a need to fill vacancies on and increase the age of retirement in the subordinate judiciary, as per the report.

The writer states that absence of proper evidence produced by the investigating agencies, unaffordable legal help, and the insensitivity of both the government and the law-enforcing agencies in treating prisoners also lead to an increase in the number of under trials.

<http://www.frontline.in/the-nation/system-failure/article6464657.ece>

<http://ncrb.gov.in/PSI-2012/PrisonStat2012.htm>

<http://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in/reports/Report245.pdf>

Date Accessed: 05.10.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

GENDER

Maharashtra polls: Women Get Just 10% of Tickets Despite Constituting Almost Half of the Population

(Rohit Chandavarkar, *The Economic Times*, October 07, 2014)

Maharashtra maintains a rich history as home to social reform movements along with claims of women's empowerment among political parties across the spectrum. However, contrary to these claims, only one in ten candidates in the upcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra is a woman. Although the state has reserved half the seats in local self-government units such as panchayats and municipal corporations for women, just 82 or 10.6% of the 7,701 contestants that have filed nominations for the assembly elections are women.

The Congress has given 27 tickets to women candidates while it is contesting 288 seats, the BJP has fielded 21 women among 257 seats, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has 19 women candidates while contesting 284 seats and the Shiv Sena has just 10 among 286 contested seats. President of the NCP's women's wing, Chitra Wagh, admits that the party responds to the demands of the people in order to win from a particular constituency and therefore chooses its candidates accordingly.

Even among the few women candidates in the fray, most are daughters of established political leaders, as Maharashtra has had a tradition of political leaders' daughters or wives taking up social work and later following into their father's or husband's footsteps. Many women from political backgrounds across all parties have previously contested Lok Sabha polls, and this pattern is much the same in the upcoming assembly polls as in the April-May general elections. In such a scenario, and with increased gender equality awareness in India, it is imperative for this equality to be reflected in the polls. This creates a need for political parties to take responsibility for the progressive move of involving women from varied backgrounds to take a political footing to represent equality and the wider interests.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/maharashtra-polls-women-get-just-10-of-tickets-despite-constituting-almost-half-of-the-population/articleshow/44544414.cms>

Date Accessed: 07.10.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Culture is Vital in the Global Development Agenda, Emphasizes Florence Declaration

(UNESCO, October 4, 2014)

The Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova recognized the importance of cultural vitality and said that it creates jobs, revenue and promotes social inclusion. The declaration was made at UNESCO's 'Third World Forum on Culture and Cultural Industries' that took place in Florence from second to the Fourth October, 2014.

"At the end of the Forum, its 300 participants adopted the Florence Declaration that advocates the integration of culture in the post-2015 development agenda, which the United Nations is scheduled to adopt in the autumn of 2015." The declaration invites civil society, governments and private sector to work together and promote:

- Human and institutional capacities
- New partnership models and innovative investment strategies
- Evaluate the contribution of culture to sustainable development

The declaration reflects the findings of UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The UN organizations held national consultations on culture and development in five countries. These include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ecuador, Mali, Morocco and Serbia.

The Minister of Culture of Morocco also recognized the role of culture in mobilizing people and the key position it has in inclusive policy making. The Minister of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina stressed the role of preserving heritage and investing in art for better urban development. The Minister of Culture of Serbia, Ivan Tasovac, recalled the dynamism of cinema and the arts as a whole in contributing to development and innovation.

<http://en.unesco.org/news/culture-vital-global-development-agenda-emphasizes-florence-declaration>

Date Accessed: 7.10.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

INDIA IN THE WORLD

India may Develop River Port in Bangladesh

(Exim News Service, October 9, 2014)

In a move to enable transport of essentials, food grains and heavy machinery from within the country and abroad to the North-East, India will be seemingly developing a river port in Bangladesh. Mr Sandeep Chakravorty, India's Deputy High Commissioner in Dhaka, said "India would provide necessary funds to develop the Ashuganj port over Meghna river. India's two North-Eastern states and Bangladesh as well would be benefited if the river port's necessary infrastructure were developed." The Ashuganj port is located on the Meghna river in eastern Bangladesh, around 40 km from Agartala, the capital of Tripura.

According to Mr Chakravorty, Water, Power Consultancy Services Ltd (WAPCOS), a Public Sector Enterprise (PSE) governed by the Union Ministry of Water Resources is preparing a Detailed Project Report for developing the port. It offers consultancy services in all facets of water resources, power and infrastructure sectors in India and abroad. In addition he also said, "The Bangladesh government is also keen to provide access of Chittagong international port to India."

<http://www.eximin.net/NewsDetails.aspx?name=26973>

Date Accessed: 10.10.2014

(Shruti Issar)

SOUTH ASIA

Sindh to Subsidize Farm Implements

(Muzaffar Qureshi, *The Dawn*, October 5, 2014)

The Sindh government in Pakistan will now provide subsidy to promote mechanized farming. "The incentives include Rs1,000m for assistance to farmers on purchase of 11,000 wheel type tractors on subsidized rates, Rs100m subsidy on hiring of agriculture implements for mechanized farming and Rs130m for provision of solar pumps to farmers on 50 per cent subsidy."

The Agricultural secretary is also keen on introducing tube wells to be propelled by solar energy. Solar pumps would now be available to farmers at 50 percent of the market price. This will ensure uninterrupted supply of water and electricity. Such initiatives have yielded positive results in Punjab.

Sindh agriculture will also be boosted by World Bank-assisted Rs8,746m Sindh agriculture growth project. By investing in knowledge and technology for farmers of minor crops, the project hopes to provide market access to minor crops and increase their productivity.

Other projects include a Rs200m cotton and sugarcane research institute at Ghotki, which already has five research centers for other crops. Focus on development of technology for production of hybrid seeds and launching of bio-fertilizer agriculture programme is being also planned.

"It is interesting to note that the outlay for agriculture in the new Annual Development Plan (2014--15) has been curtailed by Rs741m compared to the outlay in the previous year."

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1136304/sindh-to-subsidise-farm-implements>

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(Shriyam Gupta)

EAST AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

Myanmar Pardons 3,000 Prisoners

(Aljazeera, October 7, 2014)

Myanmar's government has pardoned 3,073 prisoners, including 58 foreign nationals as part of an amnesty. The Ministry of Information announced that the prisoners are being freed on 'humanitarian grounds.'

Most of the criminals being released have committed minor crimes. The Political Prisoner Scrutiny Committee said that 13 of the prisoners being released were arrested on political offences. Moreover, eight were "former senior military intelligence officers detained after the 2004 ousting of former prime minister and intelligence chief."

Ye Aung, a former prisoner himself and now a member of the government committee noted that the release were timed ahead of the meeting of Asia-Pacific leaders in Myanmar next month. United States President Barack Obama is also attending the meeting. Prison amnesties tend to coincide with international visits to display a nation's benevolent policies.

"President Thein Sein, a former general who was elected in 2011 after five decades of military rule, had pledged to free all political offenders by the end of the year." The president has already freed 1000 prisoners under dozen amnesties since taking office.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/10/myanmar-pardons-more-than-3000-prisoners-20141078411568883.html>

Date Accessed: 8.10.2014
(Shriyam Gupta)

World Bank Cuts China's Growth Forecast

(rt.com, October 6, 2014)

With rising global monetary constraints, the World Bank has cut the growth forecast for China. It now predicts that China will grow at 7.4 percent this year and 7.2 percent next year as compared to previous forecast of 7.6 percent and 7.5 percent. "Even so it will remain the fastest-growing developing country in the world."

China's slow growth can be attributed to massive spending to address financial vulnerabilities and structural constraints. World bank identified rising local debt, curbing shadow banking, high-energy demand, and elevated pollution level will reduce investment and manufacturing output.

The report by World Bank said that China could regain its efficiency by relaxing entry of private sector in areas reserved for state enterprises. Moreover, improving governance and tightening performance standards will also boost growth.

"Growth in developing East Asia and Pacific (EAP) will moderate from 7.2 percent in 2013 to 6.9 percent in 2014–15." Excluding China, the World Bank predicts that developing nation will grow at 4.8 percent but will increase growth to 5.3 percent in 2015. This can be attributed to higher export and domestic economic reforms advance in the larger Southeast Asian economies.

<http://rt.com/business/193440-worldbank-cuts-china-forecast/>

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(Shriyam Gupta)

Burma's Law Bars Non-Citizens From Politics

(*The Irrawaddy*, October 3, 2014)

An amendment to Burma's Political Parties Registration Law was made into a law, removing the right of temporary citizenship cardholders to form political parties or serve as their members after President Thein Sein signed the amendment. This law targets the country's Rohingya Muslim minority. Many amongst Rohingyas hold "white cards" that grant them status as temporary citizens. The amended legislation restricts the right to form and join political parties only to individuals holding full citizenship status which previously any "citizen, associate citizen, naturalized citizen or temporary certificate holder" could hold.

White cards were issued to many of the Rohingya population in northern Arakan State's Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships by Burma's former military government. The cards were issued to allow the Muslim group to vote in a constitutional referendum in 2008, as well as in the national elections in 2010. The Burmese government maintains that approximately one million-strong minority are not Burmese citizens and officially refers to them as "Bengalis," suggesting they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Phil Robertson, Deputy Director of Human Rights Watch's Asia division, said for the amendment that "It is nothing less than a blueprint for permanent segregation and statelessness that appears designed to strip the Rohingya of hope and force them to flee the country."

The amendment could also pose a problem for political dissidents lacking citizenship cards because they lived abroad for decades under the former military regime and returned to Burma when the country underwent democratic reforms.

<http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/president-signs-amended-law-barring-non-citizens-politics.html>

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(Afreen Faridi)

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