

## **Budget Allocation for Ministry of Women and Child Development 2016-17 : Budget Cut and its Impacts**



Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/motherchild-healthcare-improves-thanks-to-icds/article7635215.ece>

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## Lead Essay

### Budget Allocation for Ministry of Women and Child Development 2016-17 - Budget Cut and its Impacts

#### Introduction:

The budgets presented by the NDA government in the last two financial years have it amply clear that issues related to human development are low on the priority list of the government. In its first full budget (2015-16) the NDA government substantially slashed budget allocations for social sectors such as education, women, children, SCs and STs. So much so that it became difficult for the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) to function. This led to a sharp criticism by the Union Minister for Women and Child welfare Ms. Maneka Gandhi in October 2015 for slashing funding for the welfare for women and children. She said, among several other things, the budget cut would hurt India's fight against malnutrition<sup>1</sup>.

The 2016-17 budget for the ministry has marginally increased from 17352 crore in 2015-16 (RE) to Rs. 17408 crore in 2016-17 (RE) (An absolute increase of mere Rs. 56 Crore) (see table below). This insignificant rise in the budget allocation for the MWCD hides substantial budget cut for its most flagship schemes such as Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS).

(Rs. in Crore)

Budget Head	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16 (RE)	2016-17 (BE)
Total Allocations for Ministry of Women and Child Development	17,036	18,037	18,540	17,352	17,408

Source: Union Budget (2016-17) and CBGA, 2016

Even marginal cut back on funding of the WCD has huge ramification in the lives of women and children of this country. Millions of children and women are direct beneficiaries of flagship schemes of the ministry such as ICDS, ICPS, Ujjwala, STEPS etc. Several women and children benefit indirectly from other programmes and policies of the Ministry... This articles attempts to highlight the major setbacks due to inadequate allocation of funds for MWCD. To understand the pattern of financing of MWCD's projects and its implication we have picked three major schemes of the ministry- ICDS, ICPS and Nirbhaya Fund.

#### Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

Launched on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1975, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), a flagship scheme of the government of India is the world's largest programme for early childhood care and development. Pregnant women and lactating mother have also been incorporated by the scheme to provide comprehensive care and development for unborn, newborn and children below 6 years. The Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) at village level are actual service providing points. Local women- Anganwadi Worker (AWW) and Anganwadi Helper (AWH) trained by the government, manage these centers. The scheme started with 4891 Anganwadi Centers (AWCs) in 33 Blocks as pilot project in 1975. The Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17) envisaged universalizing services of ICDS with improved qualities of services. Currently 13.46 Lakh operational AWCs provide supplementary nutrition to more than 1022 lakh children, pregnant women and lactating mothers across the country and provide Pre-School Education to more than 365 lakh children in the age group of 3-6 years. The concept of AWCs goes beyond just providing above-mentioned services. It has been playing a vital role in ensuring overall development of a child and basic health of pregnant women and lactating mothers. AWWs monitor health and growth of its target population on a regular basis. The comprehensive monitoring system of ICDS is also linked with assessment of nutritional needs of its clients and referral services. This mechanism

<sup>1</sup> <http://in.reuters.com/article/india-health-malnutrition-maneka-gandhi-idINKCN0SD1AV20151019>

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of ICDS has substantially contributed in reducing maternal mortality, child mortality, neo-natal mortality and malnutrition among women and children.

The ICDS is largely funded by the central government; State governments share a marginal part of the total cost of ICDS. The existing cost-sharing ratio for core ICDS between Centre and State is 90:10. The sharing pattern of supplementary nutrition between the Centre and North-Eastern States is 90:10 ratios; where rest of the States are concerned, the existing sharing pattern in respect of supplementary nutrition is 50:50. It is evident from this funding pattern, that even a marginal reduction in funding of ICDS by the central government can adversely affect health, nutrition, growth and education of millions of children and women. However, in last two years the NDA government has substantially reduced ICDS fund. In its first full budget presented for FY 2015-16 by NDA government reduced ICDS fund from Rs. 16684 crore in 2014-15 (RE) to Rs. 15587 crore (Absolute reduction of Rs. 1097 crore) (see table below). Responding to this, the Union Minister for WCD in 2015, admitted that the fund allocated by the government was not enough to pay even the salaries of its grass root workers. It was expected that with this criticism by the Minister herself, the government would improve funding of ICDS in FY 2016-17. Surprisingly, the government has ignored concerns expressed by the minister and reduced funding of ICDS further. The union budget presented on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2016 for FY 2016-17 has allotted a mere Rs. 14000 crore for ICDS. However, this time, the Minister of WCD, Mrs. Maneka Gandhi showed her satisfaction with the new budget.

### ICDS Budget Estimate for 2016-17

(Rs. in Crore)

Budget Head	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16 (RE)	2016-17 (BE)
<b>Core ICDS</b>	15,768	16,401	16,684	15,587	14,000
<b>National Nutrition Mission</b> (Nutrition program for women and children)	83	200	123.83	134.42	863
<b>Umbrella ICDS</b> (Includes ICDS, Nutrition Mission, IGMSY, SABLA and Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers)	<b>16,459</b>	<b>17,188</b>	<b>17,747</b>	<b>16,428</b>	<b>15,873</b>

Source: Union Budget (2016-17) and CBGA, 2016

The second budgetary cut in a row for ICDS scheme would adversely affect the development and nutritional empowerment process of millions of children and women. The current allocation of Rs. 14000 crore is quite low in comparison to the actual budget spent by UPA government in 2014-15 (Rs. 16684 crore). Over the period the network of AWCs under ICDS has increased significantly, thereby lakhs of new beneficiaries- both children and women especially from poor and disadvantaged background such as rural and tribal areas or from dalit and minority communities have been assured of supplementary nutrition and pre-school education. Ideally, the budget allocation should increase year after year; but in last two years, the NDA government has slashed the ICDS budget by Rs. 2,684 crore (16% reduction in ICDS budget). In fact, the current budget allocation for the scheme is the lowest in last five years.

In an unprecedented move, the government has substantially increased funds for 'National Nutrition Mission'. The allocation for the mission has increased from Rs. 134.42 crore in 2015-16 (RE) to Rs. 863 crore in 2016-17. However, this allocation does not mean more resources for supplementary nutrition distributed by the Ministry. The mission has brought together various schemes addressing issues of maternal and child malnutrition under one umbrella. According to the description of mission available in budget document of the Ministry, this scheme "introduce a nation-wide information, education and communication campaign against malnutrition and make nutrition a focus in the programmes and schemes of line Ministries. This also covers ICDS Systems Strengthening and Nutrition Improvement Project being partly financed by the World Bank and also Integrated Education in Nutrition (IEN) which covers Nutrition advocacy, orientation of grass-root level functionaries and community volunteers and strengthening of the quality assurance system by way of setting up of four advanced Food Testing Laboratories." The government has also

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subsumed this scheme under umbrella ICDS; Therefore, network of AWCs of ICDS will play key role in executing this scheme. The last two budgets have weakened ICDS and therefore it is unfair to expect that an underpaid/underpaid staff and understaffed system to execute flagship scheme such as National Nutrition Mission is doubtful.

### IMPACT of Slashing ICDS Budget

The XI and XII five-year plan envisaged universalization and strengthening of ICDS scheme to provide quality service to every child. ICDS was recognized as a comprehensive system to address issues such as malnutrition, anemia, maternal care, child health, women empowerment, mortality and morbidity among women and children. The increased financial allocation by the previous union government helped in rapid expansion of ICDS network across India. The increased financial resources also translated into qualitative improvement in service delivery as it helped in recruiting more staff and arranging basic amenities in AWCs. Last two union budgets have ignored both universalisation and strengthening of ICDS. The current reduction in ICDS fund will adversely affect million of disadvantaged children and women in following ways.

**Setback for Universalisation of ICDS:** Inadequate financial resources will adversely affect expansion and universalisation of ICDS network. Currently it requires 14 lakh AWCs to cater to the existing population, however currently there are only 13.46 lakh functional AWCs. We need close to 54 thousands new AWCs to meet this demand. The budget cut would adversely affect meeting the demand of AWCs. Data reveals that in the first financial year (2014-15) the NDA government had only created 4040 new AWCs as against average annual increase of more than 40,000 during UPA-II. This huge short fall of AWCs is depriving millions of women and children of nutritional support and pre-school education (PSE). According to the data available on the website of ICDS, on an average an AWC provides PSE to 29 children and supplementary nutrition to 81 children, pregnant women and lactating mothers. A simple calculation show that the shortfall of 54 thousands AWCs has been depriving PSE to 15.6 lakh children and supplementary nutrition to 43.74 lakh children and women.

**No new Recruitment of Staff for ICDS:** The increased allocation for ICDS during tenure of UPA government not only helped to accelerate process of setting up new AWCs but it also helped in providing adequate human resources for AWCs. The current financial crunch of WCD will adversely affect process of recruiting new Aganwadi Workers (AWW), Aganwadi Helpers (AWH), Supervisors and other administrative staff for ICDS. Currently 62,970 post of AWW and 1,18,609 post of AWH are vacant across the country. The UPA-II government recruited 2.27 lakh AWW and 1.25 lakh AWH between 2009 to 2014 (See table below). The budget cut for ICDS would adversely affect process of providing adequate and trained staff to ICDS and AWCs.

Name of the ICDS Functionaries	Sanctioned by GOI	Sanctioned by State Govt.	In-position	Vacant	In position	Vacant
			2014		2009	
CDPOs/ACDPOs	9,047	8,451	5,495	2,956	5,767	3,236
Supervisors	55,187	50,408	35,735	14,673	30,256	23,273
AWWs	14,00,000	13,50,821	12,87,851	62,970	10,60,587	2,95,440
Helpers	12,83,150	12,83,150	11,64,541	1,18,609	10,38,947	2,03,149

Source: <http://icds-wcd.nic.in/icds/Qpr0314forwebsite23092014/currentstatus.htm>

**Weakens Fight against Malnutrition:** A latest report of Public Health Foundation (PHFI) published in 2015 on Child Malnutrition has revealed that serious efforts in last 10 years have helped India reduce malnutrition substantially among children. The Report acknowledged that during 2006 and 2014 the rate of decline in child malnutrition was fastest ever in India. The ICDS is main and largest scheme to address the issues of malnutrition among children and women. The improved allocation for ICDS in last 10 years has helped India to progress on this important front. The budget cut for ICDS in last two budget has adversely affected India's fight against malnutrition. It is true that the government has substantially increased fund allocation under National Nutrition Mission in current budget estimate but

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its implementation is highly doubtful. The ICDS system is responsible for the implementation of this scheme, but we have seen that millions of women and children are still out of the ambit of the scheme. Even in the existing network of ICDS there is a huge shortage of grass root workers (AWW and AWH) to implement it. Increased allocation for nutrition component is a positive step but it cannot help people without strengthening ICDS structure.

### Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)

The government of India introduced a centrally supported comprehensive scheme in 2009-201 called the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) to bring several existing child protection programmes under one umbrella. The financial resources allocated to the scheme, funds other subsidiary schemes such as shelter homes, observation homes, open shelters, JJ Boards, adoption centers, non-institutional care etc. This is the only scheme, which ensures protection for children from various kinds of exploitation. The fund allocation for ICPS has also been reduced. The current budget has decreased the allocation by nearly Rs. 50 crore when compared to the actual expenditure incurred by the scheme in 2014-15. The funding of ICPS has also seen a sharp decline ever since the NDA government came in power. Funding of the scheme has decreased from Rs. 446.07 Crore in 2014-15 to Rs. 402.23 crore in 2015-16 and the current budget has reduced it to Rs. 397 crore for financial year 2016-17 (see table below).

(Rs. in Crore)

Budget Head	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16 (RE)	2016-17 (BE)
Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)	273	270	446.07	402.23	397.0

Source: Union Budget (2016-17) and CBGA, 2016

The latest NCRB data shows that the crime against children is on rise. The incidents of crime against children rose from 2.13 lakh in 2010 to 3.37 lakh in 2014 (58% increase in crime against children). The data also reveals that the children seeking protection is increasing year after year. Starving this scheme of funds will further increase vulnerability of millions of children who are already in danger. The government has recently amended the Juvenile Justice Act. According to the new law, children involved in heinous crimes can be tried in regular court and put in adult jail. The JJ Board in this case has responsibility to assess the condition of offender based on assessments done by experts including psychologists. To enact this provision of the law, strengthening of JJ boards and employment of experts across the country is necessary. Therefore, the Act calls for money to meet the additional infrastructural and human resource requirements laid down by it. With a substantial cut in budget of ICPS will affect this process. It will further lead to institutional victimization of thousands of children who are in conflict with law.

### Nirbhaya Fund

Women security and protection is of utmost importance given the statistics of rape, molestation and violence against women. The Nirbhaya Fund was instituted to address critical gap pertaining to security of women. However, even after three years since the fund was instituted, it remains largely unspent. The Nirbhaya Fund instituted by UPA government in 2013 with initial corpus of Rs. 1000 crore, now has total corpus of Rs. 3000 crore. The fund was created with a vision to fund activities related to protection of women. However, the government could not utilize the fund for desired objectives. Moreover, government has not allotted any additional resources for the Nirbhaya Fund in current budget.

(Rs. in Crore)

S.no.	Budget Heads	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16 (RE)	2016-17 (BE)
1	One Stop Centre	0	0	0	0	75
2	Women's Helpline	0	0	0	1	25
3	<b>Other Schemes</b>					400
	a. National Awards for Child Welfare,					
	b. Contribution to UNICEF,					
	c. administrative expenditure of its office in New Delhi					
	<b>Schemes funded from Nirbhaya Fund</b>					<b>500</b>

Source: Union Budget (2016-17) and CBGA, 2016

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The budget estimate of Ministry of Women and Child Development for year 2016-17 proposes to spend Rs. 500 crore of the funds on various activities (see table above). Out of Rs. 500 crore estimated for expenditure in FY 2016-17, only Rs. 100 crore is allocated for projects related to protection of women. It allocates Rs. 75 crore for One Stop Centre and Rs. 25 crore for Women's Helpline. Rest 80% of the proposed expenditure (Rs. 400 crore) will be used for Awards, administrative expenditure and contribution to UNICEF. Allocating 80% of financial resources of Nirbhaya fund in administrative and similar expenditure are against the core objectives of Nirbhaya Fund. Budget break-up of Nirbhaya Fund for year 2016-17 reveals that the government is using it for Ministry's regular expenditures such as contribution to UNICEF and Awards.

### Conclusion:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has been crucial in providing a platform for care and protection for millions of children and women of the country. Through various schemes, it has been providing supplementary nutrition, immunization, basic health care, pre-school education and institutional care for vulnerable children and women. In last two budgets, we have seen that the government has slashed funding of the Ministry and its flagship schemes. The NDA government has starved the Ministry of funds and hence not only restricted process of expansion of its services but adversely affected service delivery through its existing system.

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## Headlines

### **Jaitley's 13 Billion for Water Plan That's Failed 66 Million Farmers**

(Abhishek Waghmare, *India Spend*, March 14, 2016)

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, in his budget speech last month, said the government would spend Rs 86,500 crore (\$12.7 billion) over the next five years to irrigate 80 million hectare of cultivated land. This means the government is promising to irrigate in five years more land than it has in the 69 years since Independence. Only 65 million of 140 million hectare, or 46%, of Indian farmland is irrigated, according to Agriculture statistics released in 2014. The World Bank, however reports 36% of irrigated land in India.

Read More: <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/jaitleys-13-bn-for-water-plan-thats-failed-66-million-farmers-26128>

Date Accessed: 17.3.2016

### **False Sense of Security: Aadhaar is Broken**

(Amber Sinha, *The Catch News*, March 17, 2016)

The enrolment process is this: the individual fills out the form, the details are verified against her supporting documents, and then entered by an operator in the UIDAI-provided Aadhaar Enrolment Client software. Here's the catch: these operators at the enrolment centres are not answerable to the UIDAI but to the private EAs. This lack of privity and the loose set of legal relationships between the UIDAI and the EAs raises clear questions of accountability. Further, the language used in the UIDAI's contracts with biometric solutions providers - such as L1 Identity Solutions Operating Company and Accenture Services Pvt Ltd, both of which, incidentally, are alleged to have links with foreign intelligence agencies - is quite disturbing

Read More: <http://www.catchnews.com/india-news/false-sense-of-security-aadhaar-is-broken-and-the-new-bill-doesn-t-fix-it-1458229604.html>

Date Accessed: 18.3.2016

### **Historical Injustice, Deprivation among New ST Status Criteria**

(Cithara Paul, *New Indian Express*, March 20, 2016)

The Narendra Modi government has decided to overhaul the criteria for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The Prime Minister's Office has asked the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to include "historical injustice" and "deprivation" as two main criteria. Till now, the ST status has been determined by the government on the basis of criteria fixed by the Lokur Committee in 1965, which are indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, shyness of contact, geographical isolation and backwardness. The idea to create a new set of criteria was initiated by Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, an RSS frontal body that works with tribals.

Read more: <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/Historical-Injustice-Deprivation-Among-New-ST-Status-Criteria/2016/03/20/article3336734.ece>

Date Accessed: 21.03.2016

## Economy

### **Budget 2016: Behind the Symbolism**

*(The Economic and Political Weekly, March 5, 2016)*

In the ultimate analysis, whether or not Budget 2016 can claim to have some semblance of being people-friendly will depend on the implementation of two new schemes. One is the scheme to provide five crore households below the poverty line (BPL) with LPGs within five years and to support them with the initial cost of an LPG connection. The other is a new health insurance scheme to provide up to Rs 1.30 lakh of cover, again to BPL families. The first has an allocation of Rs 2,000 crore for 2016–17 and the second may well be handed over to private insurance and private hospital chains to implement.

Read More: <http://www.epw.in/journal/2016/10/editorials/budget-2016-behind-symbolism.html>

Date Accessed: 14.3.2016

### **Ramifications of Budget 2016-17**

*(Parthasarathi Shome, The Business Standard, March 15, 2016)*

The Budget has placed too little emphasis on tax reform or tax revenue sources of financing. The tax structure is worse today than on 28 February. Of the heavy emphasis on non-tax revenue, many have insufficient basis within the 2016-17 timeframe. The apparently benign objective of a shift towards the farmer does not stand on firm ground. The big question remains why government missed a genuine opportunity for working out a viable roadmap for fundamental reform bring individuals and business into confidence by presenting a meaningful social contract, and then adhering to it.

Read More: [http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/parthasarathi-shome-ramifications-of-budget-2016-17-116031501325\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/parthasarathi-shome-ramifications-of-budget-2016-17-116031501325_1.html)

Date Accessed: 16.3.2016

## Governance & Development

### *POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE*

#### **UGC Anti-Ragging Rules, Penalty for Race, Caste Remarks**

(Neelam Pandey, *The Hindustan Times*, March 18, 2016)

Universities and colleges have witnessed a spurt in incidents of discrimination on grounds of regional or caste origins over the past few years. As students from the northeast in particular faced a lot of discrimination, former HRD minister Pallam Raju had requested the UGC to consider racial discrimination as ragging. Addressing someone as Bihari or chinki, for instance, or practising discrimination on the basis of someone being a transgender person will come under an expanded definition of ragging approved as part of the latest amendment in regulations at a UGC (University Grants Commission) meeting on February 4.

Read More: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/education/ugc-anti-ragging-rules-prescribe-penalties-for-race-caste-remarks/story-QhcMtoC1Uk7TzOln4IJxrM.html>

Date Accessed: 18.3.2016

#### **Railway Signs MoU with ISRO to Provide Passenger Information**

(*Free Press Journal*, March 17, 2016)

Indian Railways has joined hands with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for effective use of space technology tools in introduction of web-enabled rail user-centric services, remote sensing and graphic information system (GIS) based applications. "The MoU will enable use of space technology tools in providing passenger information for all trains, indicating next station/stoppage, real-time train-tracking, survey of new rail route alignments particularly in hilly and difficult terrains."

Read more: <http://www.freepressjournal.in/railway-signs-mou-with-isro-to-provide-passenger-information/806138>

Date Accessed: 18.03.2016

### *HEALTH*

#### **Health Budget Figures Tell a Sick Story**

(Pavitra Mohan, *The Wire*, March 16, 2016)

The health status of India's citizens continues to be bad and the proof is: the country continues to have the distinction of having the largest number of infant deaths, maternal deaths and tuberculosis cases in the world. Its public health systems are in disarray: about 15,000 doctor positions at primary health centres are lying vacant, and 4,000 out of 5,000 community health centres do not have even a single obstetrician. With an allocation of about Rs 33,000 crores – reflecting a token increase in health allocation of 13% over past year's allocation (which was itself lower than the previous year) – the finance ministry neither allocates the required funds nor provides an indication of the government's commitment. The only consolation one can draw from Arun Jaitley's latest budget is that the allocations could have been even lower.

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/03/16/health-budget-figures-tell-a-sick-story-24924/>

Date Accessed: 16.3.2016

#### **Knee Jerk Reaction**

(*The Business Standard*, March 17, 2016)

The government's decision to ban 344 fixed-dose combinations may be well-intentioned but the way it has been implemented leaves a lot to be desired. Fixed-dose combinations are medicines that come mixed in a certain proportion. The idea is to benefit the patient from the added effects of two or more medicines and ensure faster convalescence. But health activists have long complained that patients need combinations in customised doses, not fixed ones. Also, two (or more) medicines together may cause reactions that are different from individual medicines. This has led to the demand to ban "irrational combinations" where the product is not supported by enough clinical data

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Read More: [http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/knee-jerk-reaction-116031701252\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/knee-jerk-reaction-116031701252_1.html)

Date Accessed: 18.3.2016

### **TECHNOLOGY**

#### **Welcome to the Cyborg Fair**

**(Freida Klotz, *The Wire*, March 14, 2016)**

Kevin Warwick, the professor who pioneered the cyborg movement in the academic sphere, described ‘cyborgs’ as essentially “a human whose nervous system is linked to a computer”. For many cyborgs, it is about convenience: the idea that you can live a seamless life, waving the palm of your hand to enter your house rather than searching for your keys, or buying a cup of coffee with a gesture instead of having to get change from your purse. Once internal, these tools can never be lost and are relatively frictionless (though not immune to bugs). “Computers are currently clunky external devices that sit on tables or in our pockets,” Hannes Sjöblad explains over email. “What would it be like if they could be as intuitive and as integral to our systems to use as our kidneys are? This is completely possible, as we can witness in the ongoing miniaturisation of technology.”

Read More: <http://thewire.in/2016/03/14/welcome-to-the-cyborg-fair-24709/>

Date Accessed: 14.3.2016

## Society

### *GENDER*

#### **Parliament Panel raps Women and Child Development Ministry for not Utilising Nirbhaya Fund**

*(DNA, March 16, 2016)*

“A Parliamentary panel on Wednesday rapped Women and Child Development Ministry for letting Nirbhaya Fund "lay idle" for last few years when crimes against women have been on the rise and asked it to come up with concrete steps to ensure their safety. "Crime against women is on the rise. Many more steps can be taken up to tackle this issue. Concerted efforts have not been taken by the ministry.”

Read more: <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-parliament-panel-raps-women-and-child-development-ministry-for-not-utilising-nirbhaya-fund-2190103>

Date Accessed: 18.03.2016

## India and World

### INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

#### A Hollow Superpower

(*The Economist*, March 19, 2016)

Russia's president has generated stirring images of war to persuade his anxious citizens that their ailing country is once again a great power, first in Ukraine and recently over the skies of Aleppo. The big question for the West is where he will stage his next drama. Mr Putin is bent on imposing himself in the old Soviet sphere of influence. In Mr Obama's last year as president, Mr Putin, fresh from Syrian success, could yet test the West one more time.

Read More: <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21695003-dont-be-fooled-syria-vladimir-putins-foreign-policy-born-weakness-and-made>

Date Accessed: 18.3.2016

### AMERICAS

#### Merrick Garland for the Supreme Court

(*The New York Times*, March 16, 2016)

If you tried to create the ideal moderate Supreme Court nominee in a laboratory, it would be hard to do better than Judge Merrick Garland. In nominating Judge Garland to fill the vacancy created by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia last month, President Obama has taken his constitutional duty seriously, choosing a deeply respected federal appellate judge with an outstanding intellect, an impeccable legal record and the personal admiration of Republicans and Democrats. Mr. Obama has picked a strong nominee, who won bipartisan support in his confirmation to the appeals court. If the Republicans refuse to accept him, they will face one of two scenarios: a nominee selected by Hillary Clinton, who may well be more liberal, or one chosen by President Donald Trump — a racist, vulgar demagogue who many Republicans have said is unfit to run the country.

Read More: [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/17/opinion/merrick-garland-for-the-supreme-court.html?emc=edit\\_ty\\_20160317&nl=opinion&nid=71538857](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/17/opinion/merrick-garland-for-the-supreme-court.html?emc=edit_ty_20160317&nl=opinion&nid=71538857)

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