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INSIDE THE ISSUE

- NCAER lowers GDP growth forecast for this year to 5 %
- Centre's inadequate food policy
- No toilets, little education

Disclaimer: The articles are summaries of the original article and the headlines have been changed in certain cases. For the original articles please click on the link given below the article.

Concentration of Neonatal Deaths and Role of Community Newborn Care Practices



Source: <http://www.livemint.com>

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COVER STORY:

- Concentration of neonatal deaths and role of community newborn care practices

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK:

- NCAER lowers GDP growth forecast for this year to 5 %
- Centre's inadequate food policy
- No toilets, little education

SECTION 1: THE ECONOMY

- India's fiscal deficit 83% of full year target in the first half
- Coal block auctioning to start without regulator
- The curse of cheap labour
- Core sector industrial growth slows down to 1.9% in September
- Tax the super rich to help poor-Oxfam India report
- Iron ore and other major minerals to be auctioned like coal
- Revamping consumer protection act to protect the interest of consumers
- 2011-12 to be base year for new GDP data
- Government must focus on banking, infrastructure to attract FDI:Deloitte

SECTION 2: GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

- **Politics and Governance:** Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana: tight timeline will not yield sustainable results; Government wants your views on raising abortion period limit to 24 weeks;
- **Government:** Why is the Modi Government withholding malnutrition data
- **Security:** Countries with nuclear power plants most at risk of Tsunamis;
- **Environment:** 4500 hectares of forest land diverted for Dibang multipurpose project; UN rings warning bell in new climate change report; India's richest forests hit by road-building push
- **Agriculture:** Air pollution impacting crop yields
- **Law And Justice:** Modern day slavery in Tamil Nadu's textile mills

SECTION 3: SOCIETY

- **Gender:** Brutal world for women; Most crimes against women take place at home

SECTION 4: OPINIONS/BOOKS

- **Opinions:** Why this attack on MGNREGA?; What will it take to clean the Ganga; Potato farming India makes a hash of it

Key Message

The Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS) is a 23 year old independent national policy think tank promoted by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. RGICS carries out research and policy development on contemporary challenges facing India.

We live in an era of paradigmatic change – local, national and global. Our aim is to understand and direct this paradigmatic change -- social, economic and political -- towards a more equitable social order.

We seek to do so by (i) providing knowledge inputs training and strategic advice to political leaders, civil society activists and the general public on the nature of paradigmatic change and role of politics in directing change; and (ii) designing institutional structures and policies that would achieve this purpose.

The three main areas of paradigmatic change we are working on currently are (i) de-concentration, decentralization and devolution of Government power to empower the citizen; and democratization of public policy decision making and of executive and judicial institutions; (ii) dissipation of structures of social hierarchy and inequality such as caste and gender; and (iii) dissipation of economic monopolies and concentration of economic power by promoting a democratic, socially sensitive and competitive market economy that advances Constitutional values.

We explore these themes in the context of a range of contemporary issues such as (i) economic growth; (ii) poverty and social exclusion; (iii) labour rights including informal sector workers; (iv) migration; (v) urbanization; (vi) regionally balanced development; (vii) social justice; (viii) human rights; (ix) electoral and political reforms; (x) social movements; (xi) good governance and public administration (including judicial reform and corruption); (xii) environmental protection and natural resources including land and water; (xiii) land reforms; (xiv) globalization; and (xv) knowledge creation and sharing, socially constructed modes of thought an education.

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Team RGICS

Concentration of Neonatal Deaths and Role of Community Newborn Care Practices

Neonatal Mortality and its Concentration in India

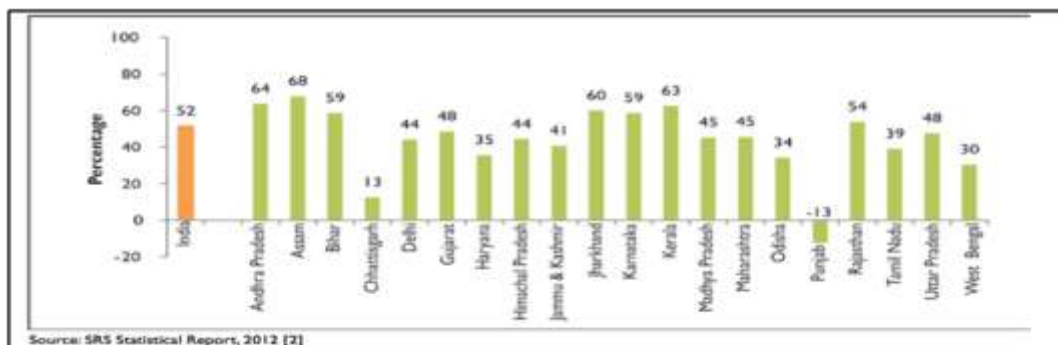
Every year about 0.76 million neonatal deaths (death within one month of the birth) occur in India, which accounts for 28 percent of such death in the world, the greatest for any country. About two-thirds of infant deaths and half of under-five child deaths are during the neonatal period. India's Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) stands at 29 deaths per 1000 live birth, and the states at high risk include Madhya Pradesh (39), Odhisa (39), Uttar Pradesh (37), Rajasthan (35) and Chhattisgarh (31). Though the Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) has declined from 52 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 29 per 1000 live births in 2012 (SRS 2012) the declining rate has been very slow as compared to many other developing countries and emerging economic states.

A latest report 'State of India's Newborn 2014' released by Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) reveals the health disparities among newborns of various communities in India. According to the report, health outcomes are shaped not just by biological factors but also by the social, economic, and cultural environment. Social hierarchies and inequitable distribution of resources produce significant inequalities in the health and well being of people (PHFI, 2014).

Considering the health inequality and social inequality interface, the poorest and most disadvantaged have a higher risk for diseases. This includes the urban and rural poor, female children, specially-abled persons, and traditionally marginalized and excluded communities like Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and ethnic and religious minorities. They also have a higher probability of being excluded from the health services. The newborn in these populations are expected to be the most vulnerable to morbidity and mortality (PHFI, 2014). It is evident from the empirical data on Indian neonatal and child mortality that mortality is high among children of these socially disadvantaged and economically deprived communities. The report by Public Health Foundation of India has also emphasized on identifying such communities. The report says that doing this will help in identifying entry points for action and setting priorities for long-term improvement in neonatal survival.

High Risk Communities

Rural Households: According to recent Sample Registration System (SRS) data in rural areas, neonates are at two times more risk of dying, as compared to their urban counterparts. The data has recorded Neonatal Mortality Rate as high as 33 deaths per 1000 live birth in rural India as compared to 16 for urban areas. The discrepancy is more marked - i.e., a difference of 60 percent or more - in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand and Kerala" (PHFI, 2014).



Female Newborns: NFHS-3 states that as children get older, probability of female mortality becomes higher than the males. Females have 36 percent higher mortality than males in the post neonatal period, but a 61 percent higher mortality than males at age 1-4 years. Although recent sex-differentiated NMR estimates are not available studying a close proxy of NMR, the IMR (Infant Mortality Rate) confirms higher mortality rate for girl child (41 for males and 44 for females per 1,000 live births).

A preference for sons and the higher status of sons in the family, determines child health in India. “Girl child often faces discrimination in healthcare. Girls are brought to the facility in more advanced stages of illness; are taken to less qualified doctors” (PHFI, 2014). There are number of social and cultural practices that differentiate boys and girls right from the birth. Some of these discriminatory practices increase the vulnerability of baby girl. A study in rural Uttar Pradesh by Wills et al, 2009 found significant differences in parent’s attitude towards morbidity of newborn boys and girls. The study reveals that the health expenditure on male newborn was nearly fourfold higher than for female new born.

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes: “The SC and ST population is the most disadvantaged group socially and contributes a higher burden of neonatal mortality” (PHFI, 2014). As per NFHS-3 data, NMR amongst SC and ST is 42.9 and 41.9 respectively. This is significantly higher than a general NMR rate of 35.2 deaths per 1000 person. Moreover, UNICEF fact sheet highlights that a child born in a SC family has 13 per cent higher risk of dying in the neonatal period and 18 percent higher risk of dying in the post-neonatal period, as compared to others. Similarly, a child born in a ST family has 19 per cent higher risk of dying in the neonatal period and 54 percent risk of dying in the post neonatal period.

Educationally Disadvantage Section: PHFI in its report reveals the evidence especially from Kerala where a low level of infant and neonatal mortality is partly attributed to its high female education levels. As per a UNICEF fact sheet, children born to a mother with at least eight years of schooling have 32 per cent lesser chance of dying in neonatal period and 52 per cent lesser chances in the postnatal period, as compared to illiterate mothers. PHFI report further states, “Evidence from India and other low and middle-income countries demonstrates that maternal education is the most effective and proven strategy to improve neonatal survival” (PHFI, 2014). Studies in rural Karnataka reveal that education can have a lead behavioral change away from traditional practices that are harmful to neonatal care. (Kesterton et al, 2009)

Newborn Care Practices among High-risk Communities

Given the diversity of India, each community and region have their own local newborn care practices. Most of these practices are strong and legitimate, since they originate from local culture, environment and religion. Some of them are also based on traditional medical knowledge of the community regarding pregnancy and neonatal care. Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) are the key stakeholders in practicing and delivering traditional neonatal for the disadvantaged population in villages, slums, tribal areas etc. Various studies on this issue have identified many practices that are healthy for the survival and growth of the newborn. However, studies also identify a number of hazardous practices that leads to many prevalent causes of neonatal death such as sepsis, pneumonia, birth asphyxia, injuries, tetanus and diarrhea. The lack of institutional care system and prevalence of such harmful neonatal care practices are correlated to the higher concentration of neonatal death in villages, slums and traditional communities. Some of these practices are described here briefly to understand their impact.

Deliveries: According to the latest SRS data, more than one third of deliveries in the rural areas are conducted outside health institutions. One in every four deliveries is conducted by untrained individual/person in the villages. A large section of population in the rural and tribal areas still perceives home deliveries as most convenient and cost effective. The practice of home deliveries is also associated with the local customs and believes. In many communities, delivery is perceived as pollution so both mother and newborn is kept in separate sheds. It is also perceived that having close and separate shed for the newborn baby would keep baby away from all evils. The unsafe places of deliveries and untrained person conducting deliveries cannot handle complicated cases. This increases probability of health complications in mother and neonatal care.

Thermal Care: Bathing immediately after birth causes hypothermia and may lead to death (Gupta et al, 2010). Various studies in different parts of the country found that the awareness about hypothermia in villages and slums is very low. The common practices in slums and rural areas identified by number of studies reveals that most of the newborn were given a bath immediately after birth (Gupta et al, 2010; Baqui et al, 2006). A study in rural Karnataka by Kesterton and Cleland (2009) found that local people perceive the blood and liquid on newborn's body (vernix) as polluting and by washing, they believe, will purify the newborn apart from of course make the baby look clean.

Breast Feeding Practices: The delay in breastfeeding and feeding baby with any liquid and solid food other than mother's milk before the age of six month is a harmful practice for health and survival of the newborn. "South Asian counties have indicated that women commonly wait several days after birth to begin breastfeeding, avoid giving colostrums, or supplement breastfeeding with other foods or liquids" (Baqui et al, 2006). According to the latest SRS data, during 2012-13 as high as 3.72 million newborns in India were not breastfed within one hour of the birth. These harmful practices around breastfeeding have close association with local cultural beliefs, faith and perceptions. Awasthi et al (2006) in their study of north Indian practices of neonatal care found that in many communities breastfeeding is delayed until after the first three days. It is very common in the rural area that first milk of mother (colostrum) is perceived as heavy and indigestible to the newborn baby and hence discarded. The new baby in that case is fed by honey, water and goat's milk. All these practices harm the health and survival of the newborn.

Asphyxia Care: Asphyxia is one of the major causes of the neonatal death in India. It is usually due to mishandling of the baby at birth. To clean the airway of secretion, the newborn needs to be held upside down and the back slapped immediately after birth (Gupta et al, 2010). Many studies found that there is a lack of knowledge about asphyxia in communities across the country and also amongst traditional birth attendants. On the contrary, TBAs adopts various medically harmful methods to deal with Asphyxia. Kesterton and Cleland (2009) described various community practices such as holding the baby upside down and patting or massaging it, blowing in the ears, sprinkling and dipping it in water and making loud noises.

Postpartum Hygiene: Various social practices and religious beliefs around the concept of purity associated with delivery and birth of a baby encourages mother and newborn to live in un-hygienic conditions in many parts of India. Other than this, umbilical cord care is a big issue in villages, tribal areas and in the slums. The blade is commonly used to cut off the umbilical cord in rural and geographically difficult areas but following the steps of clean cord care remain a problem. Most people lack knowledge about sterilization of the blade and after care. . Baqui et al (2006) have identified cord cutting and tying practices in rural India as risk factors for neonatal infections.

Policy Responses and Way Forward

The entire cycle of reproduction and local cultural practices are intertwining. There are number of good neonatal care practices but we have also witnessed a number of harmful practices that fuel mortality of newborns. It shows us that the issue is not just medical but also has social dimensions. Indian Maternal and Child health policies have always addressed social aspect in various ways. In the last decade, National Rural Health Mission promoted community level interventions through ASHAs. However, TBAs remain the main source for delivering both good and bad community practices. The Indian policies never took TBAs seriously to involve them in health system other than providing them some skill trainings. There were no serious efforts to exchange knowledge between TBAs and modern medical professionals. Health system needs to accommodate TBAs and consider their community influence, traditional knowledge and skills along with knowledge gap to promote better neonatal care in the country.

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Prepared by:
Jeet Singh and Shriyam Gupta

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

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

States	Rural	Urban	General
All India	6.68	6.34	6.46
Northern Region			
Jammu & Kashmir	5.49	5.73	5.57
Himachal Pradesh	6.11	5.99	6.05
Punjab	6.96	5.84	6.40
Chandigarh	7.29	7.39	7.41
Uttarakhand	7.09	5.03	6.19
Haryana	5.19	7.10	5.86
Delhi	3.53	4.89	4.89
Uttar Pradesh	7.47	6.18	7.39
Western Region			
Rajasthan	7.55	6.18	7.02
Gujarat	6.08	5.33	5.75
Maharashtra	5.82	5.29	5.46
Goa	7.16	5.84	6.54
Lakshadweep	9.87	10.10	10.02
Daman & Die	7.70	7.34	7.56
Dadra Nagar & Haveli	-2.95	3.49	5.19
Central Region			
Madhya Pradesh	5.18	5.70	5.34
Chattishgarh	6.92	5.83	6.56
Southern Region			
Andhra Pradesh	3.93	5.59	4.53
Karnakata	3.47	8.00	5.78
Kerala	8.73	9.49	8.98
Tamil Nadu	5.39	5.67	5.50
Puducherry	5.46	5.89	5.78
Andaman & Nicobar Island	10.13	3.67	6.81
Northeastern Region			
Arunachal Pradesh	7.43	-	-
Assam	8.37	8.82	8.49
Manipur	1.74	7.27	3.69
Meghalaya	15.72	9.41	14.30
Mizoram	11.09	4.58	7.57
Nagaland	15.54	7.53	12.21

States	Rural	Urban	General
Tripura	16.24	11.93	15
Sikkim	7.55	8.62	7.72
Eastern Region			
Bihar	8.64	7.13	8.33
Jharkhand	3.95	7.84	5.19
West Bengal	6.76	7.26	6.94
Odisha	11.89	9.24	11.23

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.

All – India Inflation rate has come down from 7.86% in the month of August to 6.46% in the month of September 2014 along with its rural and urban decline. Amongst the states also the inflation rate has come down except for few states like Kerala, where its rural and combined rates have gone high from its previous month. Similarly in Odisha and Gujarat, the combined inflation rate has gone high from the previous month. For the month of September, Meghalaya has seen highest inflation with 14.30% and Andhra Pradesh has seen lowest inflation with 4.53%.

NCAER Lowers GDP Growth Forecast for this Year to 5%

(Business Standard, November 5, 2014)

The economic think tank, National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) has lowered the India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth forecast by 0.7% for the current financial year. Earlier projections of the NCAER showed that the economy will grow at 5.7% in 2014-15, whereas on Tuesday, November 4, in a release, it suggested GDP growth forecast to be 5% in 2014-15. It said the overall economy is looking weak with uncertain growth prospects. It majorly highlights the role inflation and investment in combating with the required growth rate. It even predicts agricultural growth to be lower than last year as there was deficit rainfall with uneven spatial and temporal patterns.

In the release, NCAER said, "The fundamentals of the economy remain weak with uncertainties prevail. The only redeeming feature is the weakening of inflation and foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows. Whether that will help us revive our growth prospects will depend on a number of factors including revival of the external economy and the extent of damage on agriculture due to deficit rainfall."

In addition, it also said, "The pace of growth shows signs of slowing down in the services sector. Not surprisingly, bank credit to the commercial sector has not picked pace and continues to languish. Further, the slowdown in the external economy, except the United States, shows little growth prospects for the external sector even though exports grew in the first quarter."

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/ncaer-lowers-gdp-growth-forecast-for-this-year-to-5-114110401376_1.html

Date Accessed: 05.11.2014

(Shruti Issar)

Centre's Inadequate Flood Policy

(Salman Soz, *Tehelka*, November 8, 2014)

Even after almost two months since Jammu and Kashmir was struck by devastating floods there is a lack of consensus on the estimated losses suffered by the state. The policy adopted by the Centre towards the flood victims is inconsistent with past practices and not in the interests of the victims. The absence of consensus on estimated losses will impact the development of a recovery and reconstruction programme.

The state government estimated flood losses at Rs 44,000 crore which is yet to be verified by the Centre. The verification process will cost precious time which could have been avoided had the Centre and state government jointly produced an assessment report.

The Centre failed to involve experts from India and abroad in assessing the damage using internationally accepted methodologies, as done by the previous government after flash floods of 2013 in Uttarakhand. The former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, had in Uttarakhand, announced an interim relief package which was followed by an assessment by international experts. This was done to prepare a 'rapid needs assessment' in collaboration with local authorities. The report was followed up by a relief and reconstruction package from the Centre to Uttarakhand worth almost Rs 8,500 crore, including soft loans from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank worth \$400 million (approximately Rs 2461.8 crores).

The devastation due to the flooding in Jammu and Kashmir cannot be dealt by the state government alone. There is a need to establish a credible and independent flood assessment programme. The Centre needs to mobilise national and international experts in the recovery and reconstruction programme for the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

<http://www.tehelka.com/centres-policies-hurting-jammu-kashmir-flood-victims/>

Date Accessed: 05.11.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

No Toilets, Little Education

(Priyanka Kaushal, *Tehelka*, November 01, 2014)

Toilets are an integral part of any educational instruction. Lack of toilets prevents many students across the country from attending schools. In the absence of toilets parents desist from sending their children to school. Such a situation is especially scary for female students as they have to risk being assaulted for attending school. The above mentioned article is detailed one which gives the personal accounts of many girl students from Chattisgarh, who had to quit school because of the lack of availability of toilets in government schools. I have only presented a brief summary.

The challenge that we face in assessing how bad the situation in the state is the lack of availability of any data on the issue. But nevertheless it is clear that the students here face a unique challenge in their access to education. Surprisingly Chattisgarh is no longer considered a backward state, but rather as the No. 1 state in rice production. The government has also praised the state for its advanced and computerised public distribution system and the progress it has made in information and technology. The economic well being of the state can be assessed from the rise in per capita income year after year. It was Rs 44,505 in 2011-12 to Rs 50,691 in 2012-13 and Rs 56,990 in 2013-14.

Today, Chattisgarh is a state where thousands of schools either do not have toilets or toilets are dysfunctional. Of its 47,526 schools, more than 17,000 — including 8,164 girls' schools — do not have toilets. In Gariaband, one of the nine districts formed in 2012, of 1,561 schools, 604 girls' and 206 boys' schools do not have toilets.

“According to a recent survey carried out by the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development, 78 schools in Raipur do not have toilets for girls and 220 schools do not have toilets for boys. In the rest of the 1,000 schools in the capital city, 583 toilets for girls and 516 toilets for boys are in a deplorable condition. Using these toilets can be a health hazard.” The survey also highlights the lack of proper maintenance, which has rendered existing toilets for

girls across the state dysfunctional. “These include 583 toilets in Raipur, 156 in Kanker, 150 in Dhamtari, 213 in Bemetara, 149 in Mungeli, 135 in Baloda Bazar, 503 in Surajpur, 359 in Bastar, 323 in Sarguja, 235 in Gariaband, 238 in Korba, 189 in Koriya and 166 in Jashpur.”

The situation is even more deplorable in tribal areas, where newly constructed toilets soon turned useless due to any upkeep. “These include 738 schools in Bastar, 683 in Surajpur, 560 in Sarguja, 394 in Gariaband, 369 in Jashpur, 358 in Koriya and 323 in Kanker.”

In a recent development Chattisgarh Education Minister Kedar Kashyap expressed concern over the situation. The state secretary for education Subrata Sahu has also said that the state is moving ahead to solve the problem at the earliest. However, the state government could well have prevented such a sorry state. Interestingly in Chattisgarh the ministry of education is allocated the third highest annual budget among all ministries. The education budget was Rs 813.58 crore for the first financial year of 2001-02 and has now increased to Rs 6,298 crore for 2013-14. “Toilets are not on the list of highlighted points in the budget, even though Rs 175 crore has been set aside for provision of basic amenities in schools, which includes laboratory equipment and furniture. Ideally, toilets should also be considered a basic need but the state government seems to have had little interest in building them.”

<http://www.tehelka.com/no-toilets-little-education/>

Date Accessed: 06.11.2014

(Rohit Chauhan)

India's Fiscal Deficit 83% of Full Year Target in the First Half

(Manor Kumar, *Reuters*, October 31, 2014)

India's fiscal deficit has reached nearly 83% of its full-year target in the first half of the year. India's fiscal deficit was 4.39 trillion rupees (\$71.5 billion) during April-September, or 82.6 % of the full-year target, according to government data as on October 31, 2014. The deficit during the comparable period in the previous fiscal year was lower at 76%.

This will prove to be an obstacle for the government, even though India is likely to benefit from the fall in global crude prices that will drive down the oil subsidy bill. Although there has been a 25% fall in oil prices since June 2014, helping the government to limit the oil and fertiliser subsidies, however due to slow revenue growth the deficit has risen. The Finance Minister had earlier targeted a reduction in the fiscal deficit to 4.1 % of the gross domestic product in the current fiscal year, down from 4.5% in the previous year.

As part of an austerity drive, the Prime Minister has asked bureaucrats to stop flying first class, so as to reduce discretionary spending by 10% in the current fiscal year. However, it is the low revenue growth that is really of concern as it could force the government to cut capital spending, in order to maintain its credit ratings. With tax revenue growth underperforming the budgeted target, the government eyes sale of shares in state-run companies however that process has not started yet. Revenue buoyancy will critically depend upon the success of the telecom auction and disinvestment offerings in the remainder of the year, which is also not a long-term solution.

<http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/10/31/india-fiscal-deficit-idINKBN0IK0TQ20141031>

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

Coal Block Auctioning to Start Without Regulator

(Shreya Jai, *Business Standard*, November 5, 2014)

The Government of India (GOI) plans to accelerate the process of coal block reallocation to the private sector through auctioning, without signaling the setting up of regulator for the sector. While the previous UPA government through a gazette notification in February 2014 did notify setting up of a coal regulator, but the new body remains un-operational with not even appointments to it being made. The role of the regulatory body under the Coal Regulatory Authority (CRA) Bill of 2013 was to look into pricing of coal on a cost—plus basis, thus undoubtedly, a regulator is required.

Though the Supreme Court had cancelled 204 coal blocks saying their allocation was “illegal” and “unconstitutional”, GOI has thereafter promulgated an ordinance for the re-auction. The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Ordinance skips the issue of setting up of regulator. GOI has further enabled provisions in the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) (CMN) Act, 1973, and the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, for allowing commercial mining through the path of ordinance.

As per the officials, “The coal blocks which would be put for re-auction are all for end-usage in power, cement and iron production. It is the commercial mining by private companies that needs to be put under vigilance and that would be done later, after the first batch of auction commences.”

A committee, headed by Pratyush Sinha, former chief vigilance commissioner would be responsible for valuation of coal reserves and assets of 74 blocks which will be re-auctioned in December. The process will start with a pool of 42 operational mines and 32 nearing production, for end-use in the power, cement and iron and steel sectors.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/coal-block-auctioning-to-start-without-regulator-114110400900_1.html

Date Accessed: 05.11.2014

(Shruti Issar)

The Curse of Cheap Labour

(V. Sridhar, *Frontline*, November 14, 2014)

This article reviews the labour reforms as a move to leave labour vulnerable and perpetuate the decline of the trade unions' ability to engage in collective bargaining. Though the Government endorses 'Shramev Jayate', any possibility of the dignity has actually been thwarted. The legal framework that is supposed to provide the most basic protection to workers is decaying. This can be seen in the state's unwillingness to use the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act or the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act in favour of labour even during serious episodes of labour unrest.

A series of factors has helped in the deterioration. One is the myth around "Inspector Raj". According to a K.R. Sundar (EPW October 18, 2014) proportion of registered establishments "inspected" in the country declined from 63% in 1986 to 18% in 2008. This goes completely against the industry's cry that it has suffered under the iron grip.

Meanwhile, speedy outsourcing and casualization has put a large section of the labour force outside the purview of legislation governing labour. And this is also true for banking, and even for public sector, including Railways, where entire processes are outsourced to private contractors. In 2009-10, according to data from Annual Survey of Industries, in factories employing more than 5,000 workers almost half the workers were employed through contractors and not directly by the establishments. Further, NSS data shows that, in 2011-12, about 25% of all workers in establishments employing between 100 and 5,000 workers were on contract. More than 80% of all workers employed in the organized manufacturing sector had no written contracts or had contracts that were valid for less than a year. For Bharat Electronics Ltd, outsourcing has got greater bargaining power with workers still on its rolls. Its unionized workforce of more than 13,000 has come down to 2,000 in 20 years. Such need-based employment ensures productivity increases stay ahead of wage costs and give industries more freedom to deploy or even evict workers without attracting the provisions under Chapter V-B of the Industrial Disputes Act. This is at stake if a desperate call is made for foreign capital and for lower labour's share in output.

Keeping wage costs in check in an absolute sense is not the agenda; instead this is a step to keep labour relations so flexible so that one side in the game acquires a disproportionate share of the benefits that accrue from improved yields. Even the cry that the education system does not offer "readymade" talent that is "employable" hides their real intent of having a large reserve army to keep wage costs in check. The demand that the NREGS, which has evidently resulted in higher incomes and improved bargaining capacity of rural workers, be curtailed or scrapped provides testimony. However, any sustainable move towards development must ensure the economic logic that systematic reductions will prove disastrous.

<http://www.frontline.in/cover-story/the-curse-of-cheap-labour/article6540760.ece>

Date Accessed: 04.11.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

Core Sector Industrial Growth Slows Down to 1.9% in September

(*Financial Express*, October 31, 2014)

Growth of the eight core industries in September plummeted to 1.9 per cent, the slowest pace in eight months, against nine per cent in the same month last year (September 2013), because of fall in output of crude oil, natural gas, refinery products and fertiliser, in the country.

As per the data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry crude oil, natural gas, refinery products and fertiliser output have registered a drop of 1.1 per cent, 6.2 per cent, 2.5 per cent and 11.6 per cent respectively in the month of September which is under review. Expansion in other important sectors like - coal, cement, steel and electricity - too slowed down to 7.2 per cent, 3.2 per cent, 4 per cent and 3.8 per cent respectively in September this year as against 13.6 per cent, 12.1 per cent, 10.7 per cent and 12.9 per cent rise in September 2013.

These declining growth figures would have an impact on the overall industrial production as the eight core sectors have a combined weight of about 38 per cent in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/core-industries-growth-slows-down-to-1.9-pct-in-september-lowest-in-8-months/1303363>

Date Accessed: 01.11.2014

(Devayani Bhushan)

Tax the Super Rich to Help Poor-Oxfam India Report

(Economic Times, October 31, 2014)

According to a report published by Oxfam India as many as nine crore people can be moved out from the state of abject poverty in next 5 years. This will happen if India could stop inequality from rising and levy a nominal tax on the super rich to narrow the rich and poor divide. Oxfam India in its latest report 'Even it Up: Time to End Extreme Inequality' has stated that levying a wealth tax of 1.5 per cent on super rich could help attain the objective of raising people out of extreme poverty. By levying such a wealth tax on the 65 super rich, 90 million people can land a life of dignity and free from poverty

According to this study, in India the number of billionaires increased from two in the 1990s to 65 in 2014 and the net worth of these super rich people is enough to eliminate absolute poverty in the country, twice over. As per Oxfam India, high levels of inequality exist in the country because the money which could be used to tackle poverty is being diverted by tax breaks and public-private partnerships. The report also revealed that more than half of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India is channelled through tax havens and the government spends almost twice as much on its military as on health.

There is a need of urgent action to clamp down on tax evasion by multinational corporations and the world's richest individuals. This will help countries to tackle inequality and build fairer societies.

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-10-31/news/55631355_1_poverty-ratio-wealth-tax-extreme-poverty

Date Accessed: 1.11.2014

(Devayani Bhushan)

Iron Ore and Other Major Minerals to be Auctioned Like Coal

(Jayanta Roy Chowdhury, Asian Age, November 3, 2014)

In India, the central government allocates minerals such as iron ore, bauxite and limestone, based on recommendations by the state governments. The central government is also the final arbiter for kyanite, sillimanite, barites, chromite, silica sand, fluorite and quartz. Other minerals are considered minor, which are disposed off by the state governments either through auction or allocation. The government might come up with a subordinate legislation under the Mines and Mineral Development and Regulation Act, to auction the mining rights of major minerals. Several states, including Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Rajasthan, were against the auction of mines because they felt that the move could prompt companies to leave them for locations with better ports, infrastructure and ready markets. States have also argued that the commitments by steel makers to set up mills in return of mineral concessions will bring development but the process of an auction could take away this advantage.

If these proposed reforms are instituted by the state government, end users such as steel plants can buy mining rights through an auction. This would promise a certain part of the mined mineral as licence payment, and then ship the mineral to any part of the country for processing. Steel companies, which have been allocated mining rights at cheap rates, are also not happy about the bidding route as it will raise costs.

The Central Government thinks that any finite natural resources owned by the state should be allocated through auc-

tions as these resources have a price which is best discovered through bidding. The central government believes that a bidding process is necessary to ensure transparency and prevent the depletion of minerals from states on the basis of promises. The new bidding process will provide for both financial stakes as well as penalties for not developing the mines. The competition among the bidders will be in terms of production sharing; those who offer the highest production share to the state will get the mine.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1141103/jsp/business/story_18992886.jsp#.VFhOtvMudgh

Date Accessed: 4.11.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

Revamping Consumer Protection Act to Protect the Interests of Consumers

(The Economic Times, October 31, 2014)

The current regulations on commerce cannot function in an e-commerce environment. The government is planning to change the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 to allow legal action against any goods or service provider in absence of constraints of territory. The law will allow consumers to approach local consumer courts for complaints against a goods or a service provider located anywhere in India.

“Under the current rules, a consumer can initiate legal action against a seller only in the place where transaction takes place.” The Ministry of Consumer Affairs plans to revamp this law to provide effective protection to online shoppers where ‘territory’ does not come into play.

The new law will cover both vendors in online space and marketplace providers like Flipkart and Amazon. However, the law will only cover goods and service providers operating physically on Indian soil.

The e-commerce industry fears that the new law can be misused against them and that it would increase the legal costs borne by the industry.

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-10-31/news/55631261_1_new-law-flipkart-consumer-protection-act

Date Accessed: 02.11.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

2011-12 to be Base Year for New GDP Data

(The Hindu, November 2, 2014)

Economic growth rate will be computed with 2011-12 as the base year for the new series of national accounts. This will help the government in presenting a realistic picture of the Indian economy.

Currently data on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is computed with 2004-05 as the base year. However, the GDP data for three consecutive years from 2011-12 will be released against 2011-12 as the base year. As per the National Statistical Commission Chairman Pronab Sen, “The new series will better reflect the economy as it would include more sectors.” The changes in the growth rates of different sectors of the economy and the economy as a whole might take a year to be able to present them.

The base year is periodically changed to factor in structural changes in the economy in the computation of national estimates through macro aggregates. The Central Statistical Organisation prepared the first official estimates of national income with base year as 1948-49. “These estimates at constant (1948-49) prices along with the corresponding estimates at current prices and the accounts of the Public Authorities were published in the publication, ‘Estimates of National Income’ in 1956.”

Revising the base year for computing national accounts every five years has been suggested by the national Statistical Commission.

<http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/new-gdp-data-with-201112-as-base-year-in-january/article6557219.ecec>

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

Govt Must Focus on Banking, Infra to Attract FDI: Deloitte

(Sachin Dave, *Business World*, November 3, 2014)

Deloitte Global recently released a report that asked government to focus on banking and infrastructure sector to boost Foreign Direct Invest in the country. In infrastructure special attention needs to be given to transport network and transport systems. In addition, it stresses on the need to “adopting an environment that enables innovation and collaboration to flourish economic growth.” Moreover, the report suggests that attention needs to be given to increasing the employability of the population.

The report titled ‘Competitiveness: Catching The Next Wave In India’ has studied data for the last 30 years and predicts growth of rural areas and lower-middle class in urban areas. These two sections of population will provide opportunities for the financial sector to grow. Increasing banking services to the citizens and the growing middle class will provide stimulus to the demand for services sector in the country.

Infrastructure will be aid growth. By 2025, India is likely to become the third largest constructions market in the world. “The country can bring back the growth in the sector by removing bottlenecks for existing projects, and re-viving the capital-expenditure cycle.”

Retail, automobile manufacturing, pharma and IT sectors would also be crucial for India’s growth in the coming 30 years.

<http://www.businessworld.in/news/economy/govt-must-focus-on-banking-infra-to-attract-fdi-deloitte/1605580/page-1.html#sthash.Yzb4yWd8.dpuf>

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana: Tight Timeline will Not Yield Sustainable Results

(T Sampath Kumar, *Millenium Post*, November 3, 2014)

One of the big schemes announced by the Prime Minister in his Independence Day speech was the Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana. Under the scheme, the Members of Parliament (MPs) have been asked to develop one village each in their respective constituencies into adarsh grams by 2016 and add two villages by 2019- last year of current Lok Sabha term. In other words, each MP is targeted with three adarsh grams. Thus, if all 793 MPs implement this program ideally, about 2,400 villages would merge as adarsh grams under this plan.

Model villages are not exceptional. Several NGOs transformed economically poor, barren, resource poor villages into model villages in the past. These were not lesser than adarsh grams in their approaches. For example Adgaon, Devpimpalgaon, Ralegan Siddhi, Hiware Bazar (all in Maharashtra), Shantipura (near Mysore) and other villages under Participatory Integrated Development of Watershed (PIDOW) programme in Gulbarga district (Karnataka), Sukhomajri (Haryana), Ankapur (Telangana).

All these models were successful because of people's participation, capacities of communities, collective action, creativity and innovation and not because of pre-fixed timelines. Time frames advised by the prime minister- one village by 2016 and another two by 2019 will be a major challenge to accomplish. If the communities are not organised, do not show signs of stability and coherence for collective actions for their growth it may pose a serious setback. Participation takes its own pace and cannot be accelerated as per the government time lines. There are many examples of failures where participation was not ensured resulting in wastage of precious funds and efforts. Since this scheme is MPs-driven, the responsibility squarely falls on their shoulders. High expectations from this human and habitation (living and nonliving) transformative initiative will be a gigantic task to fulfil especially when it is pitted against the five-year term. Community organisation and its active participation, social processes, equity issues, conflicts and their resolution and other local socio-political factors are bound to crop up.

These can be addressed by ensuring social justice, removing inequalities, making landless shareholders in village commons, living and working together for common goals and progress towards adarsh.

<http://www.millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=74367>

Date Accessed: 04.11.2014

(Devyani bhushan)

Government Wants Your Views on Raising Abortion Period Limit to 24 Weeks

(*Hindustan Times*, November 01, 2014)

The new Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) draft bill says abortions can be performed not only by allopathic doctors but also by ayurveds, homeopaths and midwives. The draft bill, which was put up on the Union Health Ministry's website for suggestions on Wednesday, has also increased the abortion limit from the present 20 weeks to 24 weeks.

The proposed amendment is a welcome move as the new Act's section 4, 2 (b) (ii) talks about the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) after 20 weeks and not exceeding 24 weeks of pregnancy in case the pregnancy is risking the woman's life physically or mentally, or poses a substantial risk to the unborn child. Further, the amended Act talks about the 24-week MTP on the grounds that a pregnancy which is the result of rape or due to the failure of contraceptive methods will be considered a grave injury to the mental health of the pregnant woman. It states that diagnosis of any substantial foetal abnormalities after 20 weeks till 24 weeks will be considered for MTP.

It was in February 2013, that the National Commission for Women (NCW), after reviewing the MTP Act, 1971, recommended to the union health ministry that abortions till 24 weeks may be allowed.

A serious debate around MTP started during and after the case of Niketa Mehta. She was more than 20 weeks pregnant. Her child was found to have life-threatening heart anomalies. The couple approached the Bombay High Court to be allowed to terminate the pregnancy. Their petition was rejected and she later suffered a miscarriage.

Foetal defects like cardiac anomalies (and various others liked in the above mentioned case) can only be detected after 22 weeks of pregnancy. The amendment is sure to bring relief to parents who face such complications in pregnancy. However, the need that the amended law be used judicially and ethically still remains.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/mumbai/mumbai-govt-wants-your-views-on-raising-abortion-period-limit-to-24-weeks/article1-1281391.aspx>

Date Accessed: 05.11.2014

(Rohit Chauhan)

GOVERNMENT

Why is the Modi Government Withholding Malnutrition Data?

(Udit Misra, *livemint*, October 31, 2014)

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) released its latest Global Hunger Index on 13 October, which indicated that India had made significant improvements over the past decade. However, there is one serious concern. “The central concern was that IFPRI’s deductions were based on data that is not available in the public domain”. This raises serious questions about the validity of the data and blocks attempts to attempt any analysis based on this index.

This joint study was conducted by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, conducted in 2013 and was reportedly submitted to the government only in June this year. “However, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) government has not shared these findings with anyone barring IFPRI. There too, it has supplied IFPRI with a single number, without any disaggregated details”.

The most important thing is that the UNICEF data showed that India had reduced the proportion of underweight children under the age significantly since 2005. In a recent press conference none of the experts from IFPRI could explain the reasons of this reduction. All they had was a number.

The only reason for this anomaly is that BJP government is shying from sharing the relevant data with the public at large. The rationale behind this move could be that the BJP doesn’t want the good work done by the United Progressive Alliance’s (UPA’s) to gain recognition.

We need to understand the importance of the issue at stake here. Improvement in malnutrition figures needs multiple factors to be working together. Rapid economic growth or greater agricultural productivity is necessary, but not sufficient contrary to what the government would have us believe. This happens because other factors like the status of women are significant in improving nutrition. Other determinants include the health status of pregnant women and the nutrition status of children in the first six years of age, especially the first two years. In fact, nutritional deficiencies in the first two years are irreversible.

“That is why it is important to not only identify which policies worked for improving nutrition, but also protect them from political transitions.” It remains to be seen then whether the government would come out honestly and improve and invest on the good policies of UPA tenure.

http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/1FQIDrHKPiK9A1xnDFVEPK/Why-is-the-Modi-government-withholding-malnutrition-data.html?utm_source=copy

Date Accessed: 04.11.2014

(Rohit Chauhan)

SECURITY

Countries with Nuclear Power Plants Most at Risk of Tsunamis

(Andrew Topf, *Oilprice.com*, November 4, 2014)

Post the Japan nuclear disaster in 2011, many countries had to rethink nuclear safety in their respective borders. Japan decided to shut down all its nuclear power plant after the Fukushima radiation leak. “Germany, a major consumer of nuclear power, permanently closed 8 of its 17 nuclear reactors following Fukushima; other European countries shelved their nuclear plans.”

The list was prepared by cross-referencing world's geographic zones that would be at most risk of large tsunamis with each nation's nuclear program to identify nuclear plants at risk of Tsunami. These countries include China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, United States, Pakistan, Iran and India.

Though the report locates two nuclear reactors at threat from Tsunami in India, “the World Nuclear Association identifies 3 of 7 plants situated on the coast.” Moreover, seismic activity in the region and earthquakes can be reasons to worry about.

<http://oilprice.com/Alternative-Energy/Nuclear-Power/8-Countries-With-Nuclear-Power-Plants-Most-At-Risk-Of-Tsunamis.html>

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

HEALTH

Unregulated Surrogacy Sector in India

(Nikita Doval, Vidya K, Apoorva, *Livemint*, October 30, 2014)

This article explores the shortcomings in India's legal, yet unsupervised and unregulated commercial surrogacy sector in India. Commercial surrogacy has been allowed in India since 2002 but remains an unregulated area. A United Nations-backed study conducted in 2012 estimates the surrogacy business in India to be worth more than \$400 million a year, but civil society activists claim the size of the market could be more than twice that amount. Meanwhile, a draft ART (Assisted Reproductive Technology) Bill has been pending in Parliament since 2010. A major impediment to any regulation is the lack of hard data about the sector. There is not even a credible figure regarding the total number of ART clinics in India. Though, there is a National ART Registry of India (NARI) but disclosures there by medical practitioners on pregnancy rates, live birth rates, the numbers of cycles are purely voluntary and are therefore unreliable.

The absence of regulation raises fears of a surrogacy black market, baby selling and questions of legal rights of a surrogate and the baby. Ideally, before a pregnancy is commissioned a contract is signed between the parties involved. However, according to a recent study by the Centre for Social Research (CSR), 88% of surrogates in Delhi and 76% in Mumbai who were interviewed did not know the terms of their contract. Moreover, 92% of the surrogates in Delhi did not even have a copy of the contract and only 27% of the clinics in Delhi and 11.4% in Mumbai were party to the contract. In India, even if the contracts are present, they are extremely basic in nature, hardly providing any security. The medicalization of the surrogate mother's bodies, amidst other disturbing practices, is another concern. Activists also claim that surrogates end up disadvantaged – as they are often not informed about the side effects like mood swings, irritability and depression of gestational surrogacy that may follow or about the number of cycles they might have to undergo. In this regard, the concept of “informed consent” is largely missing from the contract.

The government must consider introducing a cap for a minimum fee to be paid to the surrogate. Currently there is no provision for post-partum care of the surrogate, which should ideally be looked at. In India, surrogacy works

through middlemen and word-of-mouth, through men who have some standing in the community and recruit women, sometimes based on their needs. The government needs to actively step in and make decisions; to empower these economically deprived women who may, and have, died in childbirth. Meanwhile, India is rapidly losing out on this business to neighboring countries as India does not cater to homosexual couples or single parents and has many lacunae in the mandated procedures.

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/1tiGqG9X9ChMt9Tb1pmNpM/Surrogacy-industry-thrives-in-India-amid-regulatory-gaps.html>

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

WHO Report Warns Rise of Cancer Deaths in India

(Payal Gwalani, *Times of India*, November 2, 2014)

Cancer is responsible for five lakh deaths in India, making it the prime cause of death in the country. World Health Organization estimates that the number could rise to seven lakhs by 2015. Over 10 per cent of cancer related deaths are due to breast cancer.

“According to the GLOBOCAN 2012, a report published by WHO to study the country-wise distribution of cancer, United States, India and China together account for more than one-third of the world’s cancer burden.” Even though India has less cancer patients than United States, it still accounts for more cancer related death.

Dr BK Sharma, acting director of RST Regional Cancer Hospital, notes that the numbers can increase five times by 2025 if aggressive action on early detection and awareness is not initiated. Moreover, Head of the radiotherapy unit of Government Medical College and Hospital, Dr Krishna Kamble, suggests that improvement in health care infrastructure is also important to address the issue.

The government report recognizes shortcomings in the system to address cancer. Health Ministry report points out that around “40% of the 300-odd cancer centres in India are not up to the mark in terms of services and equipment available.” Also, there is a significant shortage of oncologists in India with only one available for every 2000 patients.

Whilst the government aims to increase the number of specialists by 2021, it will also need to double the number of cancer centres by 2020 to challenge the impending crises.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/WHO-report-laments-rise-of-cancer-deaths-in-India/articleshow/45008620.cms>

Date Accessed: 3.11.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

Acute Shortage of Doctors in Hospitals

(Bindu Shajan Perappadan, *The Hindu*, November 2, 2014)

According to the ‘Via HRx Healthcare Talent Issues Study’, released on November 1, 2014, the Indian healthcare delivery setups are dealing with acute shortage of healthcare professionals and severe challenges in acquiring the right talent. The study included CEOs, medical directors and HR heads. It revealed that 99% of the hospitals are facing shortage of doctors. This results in 47% of the hospitals failing to align the right professionals.

20% of the hospitals outsource specialists that add a much higher cost. Another 31% hospitals said they compromise on quality. A striking finding, however, is that more than 60% of hospital and HR heads believed that the situation would get worse in coming years. When asked about the reasons for the lack of and inaccessibility to the desired talent, 94% of the respondents felt it was because of a genuine shortage of doctors. Meanwhile, 53% also believed that doctors were more interested in running their own clinics. A high 32% credited migration of doctors as a reason,

as well. A well-accepted fact was that a limited budget and high salary demand by doctors impacts recruitment in a major way, thereby impacting the healthcare system in the country.

All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) director Dr. M.C. Misra said, “As suggested by the study, hospitals have a tough time when it comes to recruiting top-line experts. It’s not just talent crunch which is the major problem but reaching out to the right talent”.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/hospitals-facing-acute-shortage-of-doctors/article6557390.ece>

Date Accessed: 04.11.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

India is the Low Birth Weight Capital of the World

(CH Sushil Rao, *Times of India*, October 28, 2014)

As per a research paper released by Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) and published in the International Journal of Epidemiology, apart from being the diabetes capital of the world, India is also the low birth weight capital.

Low birth weight of babies is a result of vitamin B12 deficiency in India. The research paper states that a genetic mutation increases the biochemical molecule’s levels which in turn lead to children with low birth weight. 20 per cent people in India have this genetic variant. Giving B12 along with folate would reduce its concentration levels and bring about a balance in its metabolic activities. However, in India, pregnant women have adequate folate due to vegetarian food and supplements, but insufficient B12 due to low intake of non-vegetarian food. Balanced B12 and folate nutrition in mothers (avoiding excess folate) could improve homocysteine levels and foetal growth, thereby reducing risk of diabetes and Cardio Vascular Diseases (CVD) in the children later.

The result of this study will enable the Government in formulating policies which would help in preventing B12 deficiencies in pregnant woman.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/science/CCMB-research-finds-B12-deficiency-leads-to-low-birth-weight/articleshow/44960377.cms>

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/gene-mutation-in-pregnant-women-increases-diabetes-risk-in-children/article6542970.ece>

Date Accessed: 31.10.2014

(Devyani Bhushan)

ENVIRONMENT

4500 Hectares of Forest Land Diverted for Dibang

Multipurpose Project

(Chandra Bhushan, *Down to Earth*, November 1, 2014)

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) in its last meeting held in September, 2014, gave nod to Dibang multipurpose project (DMP) after having twice rejected this controversial project previously—in July, 2013 and in April, 2014. DMP will be the biggest hydropower project in India. The dam will be constructed in the Lower Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh (AP) and will affect several districts in AP and Assam. Besides rich forest cover, the project is very near to the Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary, considered to be an important habitat of schedule I species such as elephant, leopard, tiger and gibbon. The project will also have an impact on downstream ecology, including the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in Assam.

The first rejection of the proposal by FAC was in July, 2013 when the committee felt that the project needs diversion of huge land that would result in loss of more than 350,000 trees. The committee also felt that there will be an adverse impact on the general eco-system of the area. The proposal was again turned down by FAC in its meeting of April, 2014.

The objective criteria chosen by the FAC in its “sensitive analysis report” based on which the clearance has been given is, per MW requirement of forestland and per unit power tariff. Based on these criteria, they decided that a reduction in height of the dam by 10 m is most appropriate as the tariff increase is minimum (by 2 paise) and the amount of forest required per MW of capacity is lowest (1.60 ha/MW).

Given the ecological concerns of DMP and its adverse impact on forestland, tribal community, wildlife sanctuary, national park and no cost benefit analysis can justify this project.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/nod-dibang-project-shows-why-present-forest-clearance-process-needs-be-scrapped>

Date Accessed: 02.11.2014
(Devyani Bhushan)

UN Rings Warning Bell in New Climate Change Report

(Mugdha Variyar, *International Business Times India Edition*, November 3, 2014)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report on 2nd November asking governments to take immediate action to curb emission and prevent climate change. “The United Nations has unequivocally ascertained human influence on the climate system and warned of ‘irrevocable’ impact of global warming if not curtailed.”

The report states that concentration of greenhouses gases is highest in 800,000 years. Earth’s surface has been warmer in the last three decades than any preceding decade since 1850s. Moreover, “The period from 1983 to 2012 was very likely the warmest 30-year period of the last 800 years in the Northern Hemisphere.”

It holds humans as the ‘extremely likely’ cause of such change. Such human influence has had an impact on warming atmosphere and oceans, in reductions in snow and ice, and in global mean sea-level rise.

Prepared by 100 scientists the report holds indiscriminate use of fossil fuels as the cause for climate change. The report highlights that if unchecked it can lead to “acute problems such as food and water crises, loss of ecosystems and mass extinction of plants and animals, severe human ill-health and disrupted livelihoods, coastal and inland flooding, displacement of people and an inhospitable climate under ‘periods of extreme heat.’”

Ban Ki-Moon, United Nation Secretary General, highlighted the immediacy of the problem and stressed on urgent action, as the world is ill prepared to handle the challenge. “The IPCC has called for a complete phase out of fossil fuel use by 2100.”

Indian citizens and authorities should be concerned about climate change as it can negatively impact agriculture, rural livelihood and urban life.

<http://www.ibtimes.co.in/un-rings-warning-bell-new-climate-change-report-blames-human-influence-says-time-running-out-612886>

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014
(Shriyam Gupta)

India's Richest Forests Hit by Road-Building Push

(Akash Vashishtha, *Daily Mail*, October 31, 2014)

“India lost a chunk of its forest wealth in the first six months of 2014 as regional offices and State Advisory Groups (SAGs) of the Environment Ministry approved 50 of the 65 proposals which required clearing of forest lands.

The Forest Conservation Rules of 2003 states that projects that requires forest clearing between five and 40 hectares need to be examined by SAGs who meet every month. EIA Resource and Response Centre (ERC) conducted an

environment impact assessment analysis and revealed that 77 projects were cleared, one was declined and seven deferred. Projects were kept under 40 hectares to avoid dealing with the environment ministry.

In 23 meetings “the SAGs recommended projects involving the diversion of 927.01 hectares of forests.” A major section of the diversion of forestland took place in Madhya Pradesh (219.712 hectares) followed by Andhra Pradesh (153.17 hectares).

Most of these clearances were made for road, about 31.67 per cent of the total area recommended for diversion. Majority of these were made in “Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand, the eco-fragile state that witnessed massive flash floods in June last year.” This was followed by power transmission that was responsible for about 23.46 per cent forest clearance majority of which were for railway’s linear projects. Other projects involved building ports and airports.

Pushp Jain, Director of ERC, states that forests are the biggest carbon sinks, which are being fragmented by roads and other projects without considering their ecological sensitivity. In February this year “Uttarakhand’s SAG cleared three road projects that reportedly fragmented some of the richest forest areas of the state.”

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2814993/India-s-richest-forests-hit-road-building-push.html>

Date Accessed: 3.11.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

AGRICULTURE

Air Pollution Impacting Crop Yields

(*The Hindu*, November 4, 2014)

A research paper “Recent climate and air pollution impacts on Indian agriculture”, published in the Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences, stated that India’s food grain production faced adverse consequences as a result of air pollution besides being impacted by climate change. The authors Jennifer Burney and V. Ramanathan found that India’s yields for wheat were 36 per cent lower in 2010 than what they would have been in absence of emissions as a consequence of pollutions and the resultant climate change.

In some densely populated states like Uttar Pradesh relative loss in wheat yields were about 50 per cent. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chattisgarh, Bihar and Jharkhand too faced relative drops in wheat yields as a consequence of air pollution. Moreover, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Uttarakhand saw 15 per cent or more drops in rice yields.

“Cleaning up the air could have very positive benefits for agriculture and food security in India,” said Dr. Burney.

The authors found that air pollution caused by fine particles as well as ozone generated from emissions caused a drop in the crop yield. Air pollution can be checked by control over emissions from transportation and power sector besides improving cook stoves used by people.

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/air-pollution-lowers-crop-yield-study/article6562403.ece>

Date Accessed: 04.11.2014

(Afreen Faridi)

LAW AND JUSTICE

Modern Day Slavery in Tamil Nadu's Textile Mills

(Rajat Ghai, *Down To Earth*, October 29, 2014)

A report, titled 'Flawed Fabrics', released on 28th October 2014 by the Amsterdam-based Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO) and the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) has revealed that workers in Tamil Nadu's textile mills work under appalling conditions, almost equivalent to modern-day slavery. It gives an account of the condition of workers in five Tamil Nadu spinning mills including Best Cotton Mills, Jeyavishnu Spintex, Premier Mills, Sulochana Cotton Spinning Mills and Super Spinning Mills.

After interviewing 150 workers and analyzing corporate data and export data of the companies, the report found that most of the workers at the mills were rural Dalit women from impoverished households, who had been persuaded from their villages with tempting promises of decent jobs and good pay. However, they were not given contracts or pay-slips and had nowhere to go to express their woes. This can be attributed to the absence of trade unions or functioning complaint mechanisms at the mills. Concerned about the status quo, SOMO researcher Martje Theuws said, "Business efforts are failing to address labour rights violations effectively. Corporate auditing is not geared towards detecting forced labour and other major labour rights infringements. Moreover, there is a near complete lack of supply chain transparency. Local trade unions and labour groups are consistently ignored."

In this regard, it is imperative for the government, who is at the end of the supply chain, to ensure that companies live up to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development or OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Otherwise, the state will continue to fail its duty to protect human rights as laid down in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and ensure corporate responsibility for the same.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/tamil-nadu-s-garment-workers-modern-day-slaves-dutch-report>

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

GENDER

Brutal World for Women

(S Venkatraman, *India Together*, October 31, 2014)

This article looks at the data from the Global Gender Gap Report 2014, from the World Economic Forum and the data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), under the Ministry of Home Affairs, in order to put the brazen violence inflicted upon women in perspective. The Global Gender Gap Report places India at 114 out of the 142 countries listed. India is part of the 20 worst performing countries on the labour force participation, estimated earned income, literacy rate and sex ratio at birth indicators. While the ranks themselves do not paint an accurate picture of the violence against women, the records from NCRB give a clearer story.

According to the 2013 NCRB records, 1, 18,866 crimes were inflicted due to Cruelty by Husband or his relatives alone. The number corresponding to Assault on Women with intent to outrage her modesty (Sec.354 IPC) was 70,739. Over 10,000 crimes were committed under Dowry Prohibition Acts, 1961 with another 8,083 dowry deaths. Apart from these, there were over 50,000 cases of kidnapping and abduction. Geographically, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh combined claim almost 20 per cent of all crimes committed in the country. Specifically, Odisha has the highest number of offences under the Dowry Prohibition Acts (2,014), while Madhya Pradesh has the highest incidence of rape cases (4,335). However, a deeper fact is that, according to statistics, women across all age groups have not been spared from rape incidents. Statistics for incest rape are similar for all age groups ranging between 100-150 cases. While the number of total rapes is highest for 18-30 year age group, an alarming finding of the NCRB is that of the total number of rape cases (33,707) in 2013, a staggering 94% (31,807) of the cases saw offenders who were known to the victims.

However, this data is mere statistics and since no one reason can be pin pointed for the crimes against women, what we need is a plane of realization wherein equality in all aspects is truly observed and practiced. Crimes against women are an outcome of multiple variables juxtaposed in a certain way. It is upon the government to strike the root causes, which the data gives a hint of.

<http://indiatogether.org/gender-gap-wef-and-crimes-against-women-ncrb-women>

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014

(Kasturi Mishra)

Most Crimes Against Women Take Place at Home

(Mahendra Singh, *Times of India*, November 03, 2014)

According to a recent government study women are most unsafe in their homes as most crimes committed against women happen at home, while the conviction rate remains very low.

“Cruelty by husband and relatives continue to have the highest share (38%) of crimes against women, followed by 'assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty' (23%), kidnapping and abduction (17%) and rape (11%)”. In a publication titled ‘Women and Men in India 2014’ of Central Statistics office (CSO) a chapter called social obstacles in women empowerment mentions a phenomenal increase (157%) in reporting of ‘indecent representation of women cases in 2013 over 2012. There were increases in 2012 on reporting of assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (56%) and insult to modesty of women (37%). Additionally the report mentions that 5% of total cognizable crimes fell under the category of crimes against women in 2013 as compared to the 4% figure in 2012.

In 2013 the rate of conviction in cases of crimes against women remained very low. It was 4.4% in rape and dowry and death related cases. In case of kidnapping the rate remained 2.5%, while in cases of assault with intent to outrage modesty it was 3.1%.

The police investigated around 86% of complaints lodged in respect of indecent representation of women, of which 85% were charge-sheeted. Out of the 25% cases that were tried in court only 21% lead to conviction. The rate of incidence per lakh was the highest (11% each) in Arunachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in 2013, followed by 10% in

West Bengal, 9% in Rajasthan and 8% in Maharashtra.

The number of rape victims in 50+ age group increased by 90%, followed by 51% in the age group of up to 10 years. The troubling part is that 5% of all rape victims were under 10 years of age and 46% were in the age-group 18-30 years.

The report also revealed that suicide rate among women was nearly half that of men. However, the suicide rates have not varied much over the last 10 years. Suicides are especially prevalent among women with primary level of education. It was found that domestic issues are the major reason for suicides amongst both the sexes.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Most-crimes-against-women-take-place-at-homes-Report/articleshow/45017766.cms>

Date Accessed: 05.11.2014

(Rohit Chauhan)

OPINIONS

Why This Attack on MGNREGA?

(Economical and Political Weekly, November 1, 2014)

The government has imposed a cap on release of funds to individual states. Moreover, two major proposals are being considered. These include limiting MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee) to the identified backward districts in the country and altering the wage-material ratio in favour of the latter. Such changes directly contradict the demand driven character of the program, which may eventually lead to its oblivion.

A wide variety of research on the act points to an unambiguous result. However, four positive outcomes stand out. These include income security to the poor, creation of productive assets, increasing women participation and higher real wage rates and reservation wages. Such results point to the invaluable contribution of the program.

There are many problems relating to MGNREGA such as corruption, delay in payments, certain inadequacy of gram sabhas and inadequate attention to the quality of assets created. However, these do not point to the fundamental questioning of the act but to issues that need to be faced and tackled.

Many critiqued the scheme as being nothing but a dole. "This is not true, if one considers the assets that have been created, especially in the form of viable schemes for minor irrigation, soil regeneration and watershed development." Another critique of the scheme is that it makes the Indian agriculture unprofitable. However, such is not viable because of three reasons. Firstly, "MGNREGA functions mainly in the lean season so it is difficult to argue that employment thus provided causes labor scarcity later, during the peak agricultural months." Secondly, jobs under the act are provided for less than 50 days thus it does not draw labours away from agriculture. Lastly, the increase in real wages, though welcomed, is not as huge make cultivators incapable of hiring labourers.

Though the act has neither an unqualified or a universal access, its moderate achievement cannot be denied. In 2013-14, 74 million people from 48 million households were employed for an average of 46 days at the cost of 39,000 crores (0.5 percent of GDP) under the MGNREGA.

http://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2014_49/43-44/Why_This_Attack_on_MGNREGA.pdf

Date Accessed: 03.11.2014

(Shriyam Gupta)

What will it Take to Clean the Ganga?

(KP Prabhakaran Nair, the Hindu BusinessLine, October 31, 2014)

The first phase of the Ganga Action Plan (GAP-1) was launched by the government in 1986; 25 cities in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, along the stretch of the river were initially selected. GAP-II, which began in 1993, included the river's tributaries like the Yamuna, the Gomti, the Damodar and the Mahanadi under it. Following this Ganga was granted the status of a 'national river' and GAP was reconstituted as the National River Basin Authority. This body accounted for the entire river basin and highlighted the river's need to have adequate water to maintain its ecologic flow.

However, five years later the river remains polluted as before. The seriousness of the situation can be judged from the fact that a river can self clean, but the Ganga got no time in the last years to revive itself. The central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) report of July 2013 indicates that the river has unacceptable levels of Ecoli (originates from human excreta) all along its mainstream. What is really alarming is that faecal coliform levels have increased in the upper reaches of Rudraprayag and Devprayag as well. This can be attributed to the withdrawal of water for power projects there.

In its entire course, water is taken away from the mainstream for irrigation and drinking. The demand is so high that the river goes dry at some stretches. The amount of sewage flowing in the river remains high because thirty-six settlements, classified as class I cities, which contribute 96% of the wastewater entering into it. The report mentions

that 2,723 million litres per day (mld) of domestic sewage is discharged by these cities. “Even this may be a gross underestimation as the calculation is based just on the water that is supplied in the cities”.

The situation remains alarming as the gap between sewage generation and sewage remains the vast- 55 percent. In such a situation even if treatment capacity is enhanced, more sewage will keep on adding because of the spike in population. If we take actual measured discharged into consideration then the gap between what is installed and what is generated comes up to 80%. On top of this the 764 industrial units along the mainstream and tributaries (Kali and Ramganga) discharge about 500 mld of toxic waste.

Cities like Varanasi and Allahabad do not have an underground drainage system. As a result of this the generated waste cannot be conveyed to treatment plants. There are areas where there is no power to treatment facilities and municipality and water utility departments don't have the funds to pay for these operations. “The CPCB checked 51 out of 64 sewage treatment plants (STPs) along the Ganga in 2013. It found that only 60 per cent of installed capacity of the plants was being used; 30 per cent of the STPs were not even operational”.

Pollution from industrial units remains significant. For example Uttar Pradesh has 687 grossly polluting industries. These include illegal tanneries, sugar, pulp, paper and chemical producing small scale industries, which contribute 270 mld of wastewater. A cluster of about 400 tanneries near Kanpur release highly toxic effluents into the river and contribute about 8% to the industrial discharge. “In 2013, an inspection of 404 industrial units by the CPCB showed that all but 23 did not comply with the law. Directions have been issued and closure notices served. But it is business as usual”.

Dams have also added to the decay of the problem. For example the Haridwar dam has greatly diminished the river flow; the Farrakka Barrage has led to the increase of salinity in the Ganga, causing damage to both ground water and soil. “The Government plans about 300 dams on the Ganga its tributaries despite a government-commissioned green panel report that has recommended scrapping 34 dams citing environmental concerns”.

The Gangotri glacier on the other hand has been receding at an unprecedented rate due to global warming. Over the last 25 years it has receded by 850 metres. “The UN 2007 Climate Change Report suggested that the glacial flow may completely stop by 2030, at which point the Ganga would be reduced to a seasonal river during the monsoon”.

Cleaning our national river is not a simple task. To achieve results an outside agency needs to be contracted and transparency needs to be maintained in functioning. A severe penalty should be levied if tangible results are not achieved within a decided time frame. Slapping a fine of Rs 5000 on people who spit into the river is inconsequential.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/what-will-it-take-to-clean-the-ganga/article6552936.ece>

Date Accessed: 05.11.2014

(Rohit Chauhan)

Potato Farming: India Makes a Hash of it

(Sandip Sen, *The Hindu Businessline*, November 2, 2014)

This article provides the writers opinion on how India became an importer of potatoes from once being a net exporter. It also highlights the major problems with the way the government practises has influenced agriculture in India. The present text is only a summary.

In recent times the price of potatoes has gone up. The reason being attributed to it is the gap in demand-supply gap in the market. The Ministry of Civil Supplies has asked the national Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) to explore the possibility of importing from Russia, China and Egypt and procured 3,500 tonnes of potatoes for the states of Orissa in July. More stock is to be imported for the states of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Assam.

Government has wrongly estimated the supplies during the last two seasons. The situation becomes alarming be-

cause once the agricultural produce come into supply-chain driven mass consumption products, the lack of data can lead to volatile prices, which hurt both households and bulk consumers. To worsen the problem the government is proposing new food processing centres. This will temporarily add to the capacity to process agricultural produce, but nonetheless the supplies will remain very unreliable.

According to the data of the National Horticulture Board (NHB) India produced 45 million tonnes of potatoes in 2012-13- nearly 10 % more than what it produced last year. India currently has no scientific data of proving the authenticity of its estimated figures. Currently data collection happens through the horticulture department officers going down to the block level, who estimate the crop yield in a rudimentary and unscientific way and collate it manually. “The data is obtained from different States; there is no common, certified, standardised procedure of data gathering”.

According to traders potato production in Uttar Pradesh has dropped by 10% and by 20% in West Bengal. However, the government data does not reflect this change, hence contradicts the ground reality. “NHB reported increased potato crop in Uttar Pradesh over the past two years and a sharp drop in West Bengal during 2011-12, although that was partially reversed in 2012-13”. NHB data says that the potato arrival at Kolkata mandi from January to December 2013 was 27,626 mt, which is just one tenth of the arrival at Delhi and Mumbai and one fifth of that at Bangalore and Pune. It remains inexplicable that how did the cities of the Gangetic belt managed when the consumption was much higher. This absence of proper data affects preparedness and planning and can lead to major shortfall, which will hit both retail consumers and the B2B (Business-to-Business) segment.

The growth of potato which forms 28% on India’s vegetable crop production also suffers because of lack of resources and technological inputs. India is suffering because we grow the same variety for all three uses of the crop that is consumer, industrial and commercial snack production. In other countries including the U.S, Brazil and Peru potato is grown in multiple varieties to cater to the different consumers. These countries have also perfected their data outputs for use-based production, which is necessary to effectively regulate the market.

In India prices for retail consumers and food processing remains high. One reason is the lack of right appliances for mass farming because farm sizes are small. Tractor manufacturers have not introduced the latest agricultural tools commonly used for automation in farming. On the other hand current primitive agronomic policies also lead to low yields. Investments are needed to introduce drip irrigation system which is beneficial for tubular crops like potato. Without these changes the country would have to rely upon bad quality imported crop which will increase the costs for the consumer and the nation.

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/potato-farming-india-makes-a-hash-of-it/article6557907.ece>

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(Rohit Chauhan)



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