

Maternity Benefit Scheme



PM Modi announces major decisions to benefit poor, neo-middle class & middle class



New scheme to boost maternal & child health

- ★ Nation-wide scheme for financial assistance to pregnant women
- ★ Rs 6000 will be transferred directly to the bank accounts of pregnant women who undergo institutional delivery/ and vaccinate their children
- ★ This scheme will help reduce maternal mortality rate & help ensure nutrition before and after delivery

(Source - Twitter, @narendramodi, 31 December, 2016)

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Lead Essay

Maternity Benefit Scheme

Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi announced the 'Maternity Benefit Scheme' in his 2016 New Year's Eve address to boost maternal and child health. It is a nationwide scheme for financial assistance to pregnant women. The scheme provides that pregnant women who undergo institutional delivery/ and vaccinate their children will be entitled to receive Rs.6000 directly in their bank accounts. The aim of the scheme is to reduce the maternal mortality rate and help ensure nutrition before and after delivery. The scheme will be floated across 650 districts and is meant to compensate for wages lost due to pregnancy. Women in the organized sector have various types of maternity benefits available to them such as paid maternity leave. But, 90% of India's women are outside the organized sector and continue working during and after their pregnancies. Thus, universal maternal benefits from the Government are essential in reducing high infant and maternal mortality rates and malnutrition.

Policy Gaps

- **Not a New Scheme**

While providing maternity benefits to women in India is a noble idea, the idea is not a new one. The current Government has promoted this scheme as a new scheme in their tweets, in the 2017 Union Budget speech by Finance Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley and in the press release by not mentioning any previous legislations. The provision for 6,000 Rs to be provided as maternity entitlements is already mentioned as a part of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 Section 4(b).¹

- **Implementation of NFSA**

- i. **IGMSY**

Implementing Section 4 (b) of NFSA would have meant universalizing Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY). The IGMSY, 2010, was the first centrally sponsored maternity benefit scheme and was introduced by the UPA government. It is currently running as a pilot project in 53 districts. In reply to a petition by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) under Maneka Gandhi said the scheme would be extended to all districts, beginning with 200 districts in 2016-17. That commitment has not been met.

- ii. **Conditionalities**

The scheme is still a pilot project accessible to very few women owing to budgetary constraints and exclusion due to conditionalities. For example, to be eligible, the woman has to be above 19 years of age and benefits are limited to a woman's first two live births. This restricted coverage to only 20% of the women in pilot districts.

- iii. **Budgetary Constraints**

The budget for the scheme was 400 crore in 2015-2016 and it has been increased to 2700 crore in 2017-2018 but, according to various NGOs, like People's Union for Civil Liberties, it is estimated that around Rs. 16,000 crore would be required to cover all 29 million pregnant women.

¹ NFSA Act 2013:

“4. Subject to such schemes as may be framed by the Central Government, every pregnant woman and lactating mother shall be entitled to—
(b) maternity benefit of not less than rupees six thousand, in such instalments as may be prescribed by the Central Government:

Provided that all pregnant women and lactating mothers in regular employment with the Central Government or State Governments or Public Sector Undertakings or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being in force shall not be entitled to benefits specified in clause (b).”

Lead Essay

iv. State Wide Implementation

NFSA was supposed to have been implemented in September 2013 across India but, the scheme has only been implemented in two states, Tamil Nadu and Odisha, using their own funds.

In Tamil Nadu, the maternity benefits are available through the 'Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme' (1987). The scheme offered Rs.300 per mother initially and has now risen to Rs. 12,000 since 2011. Between 15 September, 2016 and March 31, 2011 nearly 6 lakh women availed the scheme. In Odisha, maternity benefits are available through the 'Mamata Scheme' and has high coverage. The money is used for food and health checks according to a survey conducted by Reetika Khera and Rajkishor Mishra.

The Government has not issued details regarding how MBS will be implemented thus, members of civil society are not very hopeful about the successful implementation of this scheme.

v. No new benefits

While the MBS is not a new scheme and the benefit was already a part of the NFSA, the recent announcement has not added any new benefits to the scheme. Various successful schemes implemented at the state level must become part of national policy to decrease maternal and infant mortality in India. The 'Amma Baby Care Kit' was introduced in Tamil Nadu by then Chief Minister Jayalalithaa. The scheme entailed an expenditure of Rs 67 crore. The kit was worth Rs 1,000 and would be gifted to the newborn and had 16 items including a towel, dress, bed, protection net, napkin, 100ml baby oil bottle, 60ml shampoo, sachet, a soap box, a soap, a nail clipper, toy, Kilu Kiluppai (a rattle), a 250 ml handwash liquid and a 100g soap for the mother. The kit also had Sowbhagya Legiyam (herbal paste) to improve the mother's health. "The main of the scheme was to promote hygiene and sanitation among mothers and newborns, and help in the development of the infant. The mother goes through a lot after the delivery, and needs some attention too, which is often denied to her," said an official of the Health Department. Tamil Nadu has a better Infant Mortality Rate in the country at 21 children per 1000 live births, annually. Experts point out that focus should also be on neonatal mortality, where babies die within the first 28 days of birth (15 per 1000 live births in a year). The kit has improved human development indicators in Tamil Nadu and should be universalized. Further, schemes for free health checkups and nutritional advice should also be made a part of maternity benefits.

• Retrospective Benefits

The Government expects the MBS to benefit approximately 51.70 lakh women in India annually. The NFSA was supposed to be implemented post 2013 but wasn't. Approximately 100 lakh women would have received these benefits if the Act was implemented. The Government must retrospectively provide these maternity cash benefits.

By presenting a scheme, which should have been implemented three years ago, as a new scheme, the Government is misleading the citizens of the country into believing efforts are being made towards improving infant and mother mortality rates in India. IGMSY was supposed to be implemented universally but, due to budgetary constraints it was not. The NFSA was supposed to be implemented across India as well but, in the last three years maternity schemes have only been implemented in two states. India's numbers on human development clearly show apathy on part of the Government towards improving the lives of one of the most vulnerable sections of society, women working in the unorganized sector. ⁱ

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Lead Essay

^{i i} Shalini Nair, Indian Express, 5 January,2016, Available at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/maternity-benefit-scheme-what-pm-modi-said-where-things-stand-now-4459269/>.

ⁱ ibid

ⁱ Ramya Kannan, The Hindu, 13 August,2014, Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/now-amma-baby-care-kit/article6309795.ece>

Headlines

Budget 2017 and its place in history

(Anil Padmanabhan, *Livemint*, February 06, 2017)

On 1 July, if all goes to plan, the country would have formally transitioned to the goods and services tax (GST) regime. By the sheer path-breaking nature of the tax reform initiative, which for the first time economically unifies the country, GST will have a special place in India's modern economic history. What about Budget 2017? For several reasons it, too, is a watershed moment.

Read More at: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/JPpnc13wedFfKTSYNh7GIM/Budget-2017-and-its-place-in-history.html>

Date Accessed: 6/02/2017

Economy

Why a note in hand is worth two in the account

(Aparna Iyer, *Livemint*, February 6, 2017)

Behavioural economics suggests people are willing to forego future gains if they see clear but smaller immediate gains. If only the government had taken a leaf out of this subject before demonetizing high-value currency notes. With 86% of their cash snatched away in one swell swoop, Indians didn't feel compelled to go digital. Instead, they tightened the hold on their wallets because they felt poorer.

Read More: <http://www.livemint.com/Money/52GlwrWTq2it9U18SOMIBI/Why-a-note-in-hand-is-worth-two-in-the-account.html>

Date Accessed: 6/02/2017

Economic priorities in a protectionist world

(Narayan Ramachandran, *Livemint*, February 6, 2017)

Budget season is upon us again. The breathless conversation about magic bullets continues unabated even though it has been a long time since budget speeches have led to any significant change in India's economic speed or direction. This budget follows numerous earlier ones with grand pronouncements combined with inconsequential change.

Read More: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/zJxJaPlCmRoKMPoXSMzYOM/Economic-priorities-in-a-protectionist-world.html>

Date Accessed: 6/02/2017

Budget 2017: What it means for the Indian entrepreneur

(The Economic Times, February 4, 2017)

The last two Union Budgets along with various government initiatives such as "Start Up India, Stand Up India" provided the ecosystem much-needed thumbs up, from the government. Expectations were high from Budget 2017. With almost 212 startups that dropped curtains last year, there is much that was desired.

Read more at:

http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/56967698.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Date Accessed: 6/02/2017

A safe, sound but inadequate budget

(Anantha Nageswaran, *Livemint*, February 2, 2017)

Soon after finance minister Arun Jaitley finished his budget speech, came a tweet by Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of West Bengal. She called the budget clueless, useless, baseless, missionless, actionless and heartless. Someone said that she was cashless and hence the tweet. There is more than a grain of truth to the tweet and to the retort.

Read More at: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/vAaQ0tRupVMU81bWxBEgOM/A-safe-sound-but-inadequate-budget.html>

Date Accessed: 6/02/2017

The Modi Government's New Policy Narrative is Tilted Against the Informal Sector

(M.K. Venu, *The Wire*, February 6, 2017)

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), an important trade union arm of the RSS, has severely criticised the Union Budget, saying it has done nothing for the millions of informal sector workers who have lost their jobs post-demonetisation, especially in the construction sector, the largest provider of employment. The RSS was probably hoping that the Budget would do a lot for those hit by demonetisation. It had remained somewhat muted in its criticism in the weeks following November 8, 2016.

Read More at: <https://thewire.in/106118/new-policy-narrative-tilted-informal-sector/>

Date Accessed: 6/02/2017

Economy

There's Nothing Universal or Basic About Universal Basic Income in India

(Kinjal Sampat & Vivek Mishra, *thewire*, February 5, 2017)

A chapter in this year's Economic Survey titled 'Universal Basic Income: A Conversation With and Within the Mahatma' in the Economic Survey of 2016-17, engages at length with the concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI). Although UBI has not been realised in this year's budget, its place in the Survey reflects the seriousness of the present government in pursuing it as a major – and possibly, the only – social welfare measure in the foreseeable future. At face value, it would seem that by pursuing UBI, the present government has its heart in the right place – trying to provide security of income to all. However, before reaching that conclusion, perhaps we should consider a footnote in the chapter that says.

Read More at: <https://thewire.in/105967/universal-basic-income-budget/>

Date Accessed: 6/02/2017

Governance & Development

EDUCATION

PhD Entry Rule Defence

(The Telegraph, February 6, 2017)

Union HRD minister Prakash Javadekar today defended controversial regulations that require universities to admit research students entirely on the basis of interviews, saying they conformed to the best practices the world over, while leaving the door ajar for talks with agitating JNU students. The comment is likely to stoke the month-long agitation by JNU students, who have been on a relay hunger strike and have described the UGC-framed norms as a deterrent to students from marginalised sections

Read more: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170206/jsp/nation/story_134269.jsp#.WJgEwG997IU

Date Accessed: 06.02.2017

ENVIRONMENT

How North Chennai's Kamarajar Port Made a Bad Oil Spill Worse

(Pooja Kumar, The Wire, 5 February, 2017)

Black balls of oil line the seashore. Sea walls wear a darker look, only to be dotted with workers scooping oil into buckets. Tanks overflowing with sludge wait for trucks to carry them away. Small boats and fishing nets stay covered in black goo. "The smell is unbearable, our eyes burn and itch while removing the oil. But we have to continue as the oil needs to be removed before we can get back to work and get on with our lives," says Kannan, a fisherman from Ennore.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/105986/oil-spill-ennore-kamarajar/>.

Date of Access: 6.2.2017

Society

GENDER

Trump Presidency, ‘One Billion Rising’ Initiative Surges Again

(Ishana Srivastava-Khan, The Wire, 4 February, 2017)

For ‘One Billion Rising (OBR) – a global campaign on women rising to protest and end violence against women – a Donald Trump presidency is a stark reminder that their mission has never been more crucial. This year, OBR, in its fifth year of existence, will take place on February 5 in over 40 cities all over India including Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai and Kolkata. In Delhi alone, 40 organisations are involved in the campaign. With last years turnout being around 15,000 people, this year is expected to be even bigger.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/105680/one-billion-rising-against-violence-against-women/>.

Date of Access: 6.2.2017

Opinions/ Books

OPINIONS

Thailand's New King

(*The Scroll*, February 6, 2017)

Since the death of King Bhumibol on October 13 2016, his son King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun or Rama X has disregarded the provisions of the Thai constitution and its conventions to an extent unprecedented in the modern history of the nation. This move might have been welcomed by pro-democracy supporters, who rejected the draft as empowering the army and the constitutional court at the expense of the rights of the Thai people. But the articles the king didn't like do not, in the words of the prime minister, "involve people's rights and freedom at all", rather they are about "His Majesty's authority".

Read more: <https://scroll.in/article/828462/thailands-new-king-is-moving-the-country-away-from-being-a-constitutional-monarchy>

Date Accessed: 06.02.2017

Union Budget 2017: The hits and misses, according to Montek Singh Ahluwalia

(Montek Singh Ahluwalia, *Livemint*, February 2, 2017)

There are four criteria by which a budget should be judged. (i) Does it ensure macroeconomic balance given the circumstances? (ii) Are the tax changes consistent with the overall objectives? (iii) Is the pattern of expenditure and the design of programmes appropriate? (iv) Does it announce significant new policy initiatives in other areas? Here is my take on each of these for the Union Budget 2017.

Read More at:

<http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/NbenUh6dQvFOXMH8Q9bLCJ/Union-Budget-2017-The-hits-and-misses-according-to-Montek.html>

Date Accessed: 6/02/2017

Building Walls

(Gwynne Dyer, *The Telegraph*, February 6, 2017)

In reality, there is no significant danger from Muslim immigrants to America either. Most of the major massacres in the US since 9/11 were carried out by white extremists. But Trump's "executive orders" are not just driven by ignorance and panic. He is consciously manipulating public opinion, and Canada's response to his ban on Muslim immigrants undermines the script he is working from.

Read more: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170206/jsp/opinion/story_134143.jsp#.WJgKEG997IU

Date Accessed: 06.02.2017

In the 2017 Budget, the Modi Government Has Compounded Its Folly

(Prabhat Patnaik, *The Wire*, 2 February, 2017)

The Budget estimates, which have generally become somewhat suspect of late, are particularly meaningless in the case of the 2017-18 Budget for two obvious reasons: first, the early presentation of the Budget means the availability of that much less information for the current year, upon which the Budget is based; and second, the draconian demonetisation that has occurred, while certain to pull down the GDP growth rate (even the Economic Survey concedes that), makes any precise prediction impossible. Let us therefore look at the broad strategy of the Budget rather going into its numbers in any detail.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/105059/modi-budget-2017-demonetisation-folly/>.

Date of Access: 6.2.2017

Opinions/ Books

To H1B or not to H1B

(R. Sukumar, *The Livemint*, February 06, 2017)

The changes, if they come (and they probably will, in some form or other), will mean that there are fewer H1B visas to go around, and companies will end up paying more for the people they send to the US on H1B visas. Currently the minimum salary to be paid by companies which have over 15% of their employees in the US on H1B visas—all big Indian IT services companies meet this criteria—is \$60,000. That number would go up to \$130,000 (according to the bill), although most analysts do not expect it to be raised beyond \$100,000. Then, things could get worse. There's

Read more: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/rygsLfb54mFG3mGT6x79JO/To-H1B-or-not-to-H1B.html>

Date Accessed: 06.02.2017

Budget 2017: Copy, Paste, Continue

(Smiran Bhandari, *News Laundry*, February 02, 2017)

The Union budget presented today by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was unique in more ways than one. Firstly, instead of the last day of February, the Budget Day was brought forward to the first day. Secondly, for the first time in 92 years, the railway budget was merged into the General Budget. Finally, the distinction between Plan and Non-Plan expenditure was scrapped and expenditure would henceforth be classified under the heads of Revenue and Capital Expenditure. As these changes were implemented prior to the budget, there was an expectation that the budget would be a path breaking and game changing one. Now that the budget has been presented, it is safe to say those expectations have been dashed – just as they had been in the previous year and the year before that.

Read More: <https://www.newslaundry.com/2017/02/02/budget-2017-copy-paste-continue>

Date of Access: 6.2.2017

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