

Linking Mid-Day Meal to Aadhaar



(Source - <http://theindianawaaz.com/protest-against-making-aadhaar-compulsory-in-mid-day-meal/>)

In This Issue

LEAD ESSAY:

- Linking Mid-Day Meal to Aadhaar

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK:

- Centre Cannot Avoid Fiscal Responsibility of UP Farm Loan Waiver

SECTION 1: ECONOMY

- NPAs: the new wedge in Centre-state relations
- The next phase of economic reforms
- The Life of Labour: Protests Against Cognizant Layoffs, Wage Agreement at Tata Motors
- Does the Banking System Really Want to Help Farmers?

SECTION 2: GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

- **Politics and Governance:** PMO tells environment ministry to ease forest clearance rules further, RTI debate: Don't scare citizens, Why Adityanath's Drive Against Slaughterhouses is Hasty and Thoughtless
- **Connectivity:** Poor Infrastructure Hobbles Digital India
- **Health:** India Gets Serious About Mental Healthcare Provision, Centre to soon finalise strategy to end tuberculosis in India by 2025
- **Environment:** We are heading for the warmest climate in half a billion years, says new study
- **Agriculture:** Farm loan waiver is no solution for Indian agriculture
- **Law and Justice:** RTI Debate: Don't Scare Citizens

SECTION 3: SOCIETY

- **Gender:** Make Sure Third Gender Has Public Toilet Access: Centre to States

SECTION 4: OPINIONS/BOOKS

- **Opinions:** Sinking Ship, Dissent and Trumpisation, Minority Report, Centre Cannot Avoid Fiscal Responsibility of UP Farm Loan Waiver

Lead Essay

Linking Mid-Day Meal to Aadhaar

In a series of moves, the Government has issued fifteen notifications linking social welfare schemes to Aadhaar card. The most worrisome notification was issued by the Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry stating that to avail Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM) children across the country would need an Aadhaar number.

The notification states that “The use of Aadhaar as identity document for delivery of services, benefits or subsidies simplifies the government delivery process and enables beneficiaries to get their entitlements directly and in a seamless manner”. According to the ministry, the move is aimed at ensuring greater transparency and to increase overall efficiency. As per the notification, cook-cum-helpers working under the midday meal scheme will also have to get an Aadhaar number. The benefits would be provided only after authentication of the claimant through sim-card based hand-held machines. This rule will be applicable across the country, except Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Meghalaya. The ministry has given time till 30th June for enrollment in the Aadhaar Scheme. ⁱ

The notification will affect 10.03 crore children of the total enrolment of 13.16 crore children in 11.50 lakh schools as per the data collected during 2015-16.ⁱⁱ Also, it comes in the midst of a barrage of protests by the opposition and various experts with respect to privacy issues related to the Aadhaar scheme.

On 27th March Congress leader Motilal Vohra raised the issue of linking MDM to Aadhaar during the Zero Hour in Rajya Sabha stating that “It seems the government has decided to take away the free food scheme from school children”. Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Mr. Prakash Javadekar countered by saying that “I want to tell this House that no one will be deprived of mid-day meals. Everybody will get mid-day meal and they will get Aadhaar card as well.” In cases where facilities for Aadhaar cannot be created, the state governments will provide the unique numbers to the students.ⁱⁱⁱ Further, he said that a large number of beneficiaries already have the Aadhaar and facilities will be made to enroll the remaining students as well. Despite the vague wording, this has been interpreted by multiple online media sources to mean that Aadhaar will not be mandatory for MDM anymore^{iv} but, the gazette notification on the HRD ministry website has not been updated nor have any orders been issued withdrawing the notification.

Against this backdrop it is important to analyse the reasons for not linking Aadhaar to MDM and why the Government must withdraw the notification.

Violative of Supreme Court Orders

The Aadhaar law passed in September, 2016 allows the Government to make Aadhaar mandatory but, it also states that no one could be denied benefits for not having the unique identity number, as long as someone had applied for it.

The Supreme Court has stated that Aadhaar Card cannot be made mandatory by the Government and that no person shall suffer for not having an Aadhaar number.^v Also, it stated that Aadhaar should be a voluntary requirement for citizens to derive welfare benefits. A constitutional bench has been formed to further examine the issue.

The Government has insisted that they would continue implementing the social security system as a “voluntary and not mandatory” measure. But, voluntary schemes cannot be a basis for social welfare schemes, as per the Supreme Court, as it makes it mandatory for beneficiaries to abide with their conditions. The Supreme Court has allowed using Aadhaar for social welfare schemes such as MNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, and pension schemes for the elderly, widows and those with physical disabilities, strictly on a voluntary basis. Thus, while the Government insists that Aadhaar is voluntary, linking it to social welfare schemes make its mandatory and in contravention of the Supreme Court orders.

Lead Essay

Further, the court's decision in the Aadhaar case on the issue of 'Right to Privacy' is still pending. It is contended that collecting biometric information invades the privacy of the citizens of India and is ultra vires Article 21 and therefore, unconstitutional. Depending on the court's decision the scheme may have to be withdrawn by the Government. Without waiting for the Supreme Court's decision, the Government has recklessly gone ahead and linked various welfare schemes with Aadhaar.

Violative of International Obligations

India has an international obligation as per Article 24 of the United Nations Human Rights Commission's (UNHRC) Convention on the Rights of the Child to provide adequate nutritious foods for all children.^{vi} But, not all children are covered by the Government in its schemes. MDM only covers children between the age of six to fourteen attending school, there is no mention of how benefits would reach non-school going children. If children are denied food for not having an Aadhaar number post its June deadline, it would be in violation of India's international commitments.

Multiple Reports of Fraud

There have been multiple reports of fraud with respect to MDM such as fake enrollments of students and teachers in schools to get rations, corrupt ration dealers, stealing of MDMs by teachers, etc. There was also a sting operation run by a journalist showing that fake IDs can be used to get an Aadhaar number.^{vii} A latest survey by Child Rights revealed that in 27% of schools across MP, mid-day meal was either not being cooked inside a designated kitchen or schools did not have a kitchen space.^{viii} A photograph of two girl students of Class 5 of a government primary school in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur preparing midday meal also went viral on social media recently.^{ix}

There is no record of the different types of fraud taking place and it is still unclear if any action was taken by the Government to prevent or in response to such frauds. The Government is relying on Aadhaar to weed out bogus beneficiaries and ensure transparent and efficient payouts. But, the Government has not explained how Aadhaar would prevent fraud or the various types of frauds taking place.^x Various activists like Nikhil Dey, member of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, have alleged that the Aadhaar number failed to stop corruption at the ground level.^{xi} Without gathering information regarding the extent of corruption, the Government cannot rely on Aadhaar to weed out bogus beneficiaries.

State Implementation

During 2015-2016, 24 districts in Jharkhand were declared as drought hit and the children did not get MDMs. The State Government's Department of Home, Jail and Disaster Management had notified the State Government's Human Resource Development (HRD) Department six months in advance that the state was drought affected. The Government did not take any preventive measures to ensure that the children get MDMs. The reasoning behind this apathy reported by various sources is the lack of inter-department coordination but, no measures have been taken to ensure coordination or prevent such future negligence by the State Government.

Jharkhand was the only drought hit state to not send a proposal to the Central Government asking for additional funds to continue the scheme. This is despite the Supreme Court ruling stating that such approval is not required and the State Government must continue the scheme nonetheless. The State went against the Supreme Court order yet; no reasoning has been given by the State Government for this failure.^{xii}

According to the Supreme Court's 2004 ruling, children in drought hit areas are to receive MDMs even during vacations. "The court's order on supplying mid-day meal during summer vacation was openly defied by three States. Instead of appointing independent Food Commissions as mandated under the National Food Security Act, state governments have allegedly delegated the job to Consumer Redressal Forums, Women's Commissions and even Child Protection Commissions."^{xiii}

Lead Essay

Insufficient Budgetary Allocations

Funding for the “National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools” increased from 9700 crores in 2016- 2017 to 10,000 Crore in 2017-2018. Multiple experts have stated that the budgetary allocation is not sufficient to implement Supreme Court orders to provide MDM during summer vacations in drought hit areas. The scheme has been active since 2013 but, the levels of malnutrition in India show no sign of improvement.^{xiv}

Drop In Beneficiaries in Schools Where Schemes Have Been Linked

Midday meal scheme (MDMS) is a centrally-sponsored scheme to boost the universalisation of primary education by increasing enrolment, retention and attendance in primary and upper primary classes. Linking of MDM to Aadhaar has actually shown to be detrimental to these aims.

The use of Aadhaar cannot be made compulsory for any services to which people are otherwise entitled according to the Supreme Court rulings. The latest notification by the HRD ministry is in violation of the ruling and must be withdrawn by the Government especially considering that there have been multiple reports stating that linking Aadhaar has been disruptive. Elderly people without Aadhaar have been removed from pension lists, NREGA workers have been denied wages due to Aadhaar seeding errors and PDS card holders have been deprived of their food rations because of technical glitches with Aadhaar-based biometric authentication. Even in schools where the schemes have been linked already, there has been a drop in beneficiaries. Despite all these reports the Government still insists of linking the schemes and risking the lives of India’s most vulnerable population.^{xv}

Will Worsen State of Malnutrition

According to the nutritional surveys conducted by various organizations majority of the children from rural India, especially from the states like Bihar, UP, Karnataka etc. are depending heavily on school mid-day meals for nutrition.^{xvi}

Internet access is required to authenticate the beneficiary’s identity but, not all schools in India have internet connectivity. The Government has not answered how Aadhaar authentication will be completed in areas without internet access and how children in areas with low connectivity will get an Aadhaar number or access the MDMs. Children in rural areas generally do not have birth certificates, required for Aadhaar registration, and this would lead to their exclusion from the scheme.^{xvii}

“Numerous studies show that India’s midday meal scheme has made an important contribution to higher school attendance, better child nutrition and more effective learning. Midday meals also help to break the barriers of class and caste by imparting to children of diverse backgrounds a habit of sharing meals.”^{xviii} But, by linking MDM to Aadhaar the Government will undo the progress made by MDM.

Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Mr. Prakash Javadekar recently stated that in cases where facilities for Aadhaar cannot be created, the state governments will provide the unique numbers to the students.” No action plan has been made available since the announcement stating how the state governments will provide unique ids to students and how these id’s will be monitored by the Government.

Biometric Data of Children and Aging

The lives of millions of children in India are being linked to a technology which is not 100% accurate. UIDAI has stated that “The loss in information due to limitations of the capture setup or physical conditions of the body, and due (to) the feature representation, there is a non-zero probability that two finger prints or IRIS prints coming from different individuals can be called a match.” In simple words, “non-zero probability that two finger prints or IRIS prints” turning out to be a match means that there is a probability that biometric data of two different individuals can be identical.”^{xix} There have been multiple reports of technical glitches with Aadhaar-based biometric authentication and the Government

Lead Essay

is implementing this technology to a scheme for children without resolving the issue first. The technology is especially inappropriate for children as their biometric data will change as they age requiring multiple Aadhaar biometric collections. This is an unnecessary burden for the children and parents without any sound reasoning.

Logistical Problems

Out of the 10.2 crore children studying in 11.5 lakh government-run and government-aided schools covered under MDM many children do not have an Aadhaar number. They must all be registered by 30th June. Considering there are 14 other schemes with similar deadlines the Government may be ill prepared to generate so many Aadhaar cards in such a short duration. There have been no special measures for Aadhaar number generation in rural areas with low connectivity.

In an inter-ministerial meeting earlier this year, HRD ministry had raised concerns over the decision to use the Aadhaar number as an identification document for receiving benefits under various school-related schemes saying the plan needs more deliberation.^{xx}

No Opt Out

Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Mr. Prakash Javadekar recently stated that “Everybody will get mid-day meal and they will get Aadhaar card as well.” This goes against the voluntary nature of the Aadhaar scheme. In the case of children, they are not capable of giving consent for the scheme and nor do they have the option of opting out of the scheme later. Thus, it brings the whole premise of linking Aadhaar to MDM under question.

The Way Ahead

The Government’s decision to link MDM to Aadhaar is violative of Supreme Court orders and will lead to exclusion of many children. India has an obligation to provide nutritious meals to all Indian children, without conditionalities but, the latest notification could worsen the state of malnutrition amongst children in the country, especially in rural areas. The Government must not make rash decisions and risk the lives of millions of children in India. The malnutrition levels in rural areas show that children in these regions are in dire need of social welfare but, the linking of schemes would exclude the neediest from the purview of the scheme. It will violate their Right to Food and India would in turn violate its international commitments.

ⁱ Notification, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Available at: http://mdm.nic.in/Files/Aadhaar/Aadhaar_mdm.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Meeting of Empowered Committee for Mid-Day Meal Scheme, 7 September, 2016, Available at: http://mdm.nic.in/Files/Monitoring/Empowered_Committee/2016/Agenda_Note_7sep16.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ Economic Times, 24 March, 2017, Available at: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/children-without-aadhaar-will-continue-to-get-midday-meals/articleshow/57810191.cms>.

^{iv} Nidhi Razdan, NDTV, 27 March, 2017, Available at: <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/children-will-get-both-aadhaar-and-mid-day-meal-says-minister-prakash-javadekar-1674042>.

^v Justice K.S.Puttaswamy vs Union Of India & Ors, WP(C) 494/2012

“no person should suffer for not getting the Aadhaar card inspite of the fact that some authority had issued a circular making it mandatory and when any person applies to get the Aadhaar card voluntarily, it may be checked whether that person is entitled for it under the law and it should not be given to any illegal immigrant.”

^{vi} Convention on the Rights of the Child, Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.

^{vii} Hindustan Times, 29 March, 2017, Available at: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/journalist-uses-fake-ids-to-get-aadhaar-card-in-sting-operation-booked-by-police/story-TT62Hz1C87vcV4smsB0ryO.html>.

^{viii} Purvi Jain, The Hindustan Times, 23 November, 2016, Available at: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/education/upgrade-midday-meal-facilities-in-schools-mp-rights-body/story-ifaLXGRgdBPIZSmt2gtmLI.html>.

Lead Essay

^{ix} Anupam Pateriya, The Hindustan Times, 29 September, 2016, Available at: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/bhopal/two-girls-spotted-cooking-midday-meal-probe-ordered/story-Qt8NQDZNJyPmuR4HSMKyBM.html>.

^x Sat Singh, The Tribune, 2 August, 2015, Available at: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/crime/57-252-fake-admissions-detected-in-govt-schools/114685.html> and Hindustan Times, 10 June, 2016, Available at:

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/ranchi/194-children-fall-ill-in-jharkhand-after-eating-midday-meals/story-zAOs8iAdF49kSf2x4cpT2N.html>.

^{xi} Dhruvo Jyoti, Hindustan Times, 29 March, 2017, Available at: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/activist-nikhil-dey-live-with-ht-aadhaar-failed-to-stop-corruption-denying-elderly-benefits/story-CPFtJ3NxfbHXJwzCm9joBK.html>.

^{xii} Hindustan Times, 10 June, 2016, Available at: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/ranchi/194-children-fall-ill-in-jharkhand-after-eating-midday-meals/story-zAOs8iAdF49kSf2x4cpT2N.html>.

^{xiii} SabrangIndia, 8 October, 2016, Available at: <https://www.sabrangindia.in/article/sc-pulls-government-apathy-over-drought-and-malnutrition>.

^{xiv} The Hindu, 27 March, 2015, Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Kochi/budget-cuts-for-midday-meal-scheme-draw-flak/article7038301.ece>.

^{xv} The Wire, 4 March, 2017, Available at: <https://thewire.in/113950/aadhaar-mid-day-meal-right-food-campaign-statement/>.

^{xvi} The Education Post, 5 March, 2017, Available at: <http://educationpostonline.in/2017/03/05/shameful-act-no-aadhaar-no-mid-day-meal-hrd-ministries-notification-will-deny-children-their-nutritious-meal/>.

^{xvii} Gopal Krishna, 24 March, 2014, Available at: <http://www.indiaresists.com/aadhar-uid-supreme-court-order-exposes-its-illegality/>.

^{xviii} SabrangIndia, 4 March, 2017, Available at: <https://www.sabrangindia.in/article/linking-mid-day-meal-aadhaar-illegal-and-outrageous-right-food-campaign>.

^{xix} *ibid*

^{xx} Neelam Pandey, Hindustan Times, 4 March, 2017, Available at: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/aadhaar-number-made-mandatory-for-students-to-receive-midday-meals/story-xgI6gODyLidcQDHkZYRehP.html>.

Headlines

Centre Cannot Avoid Fiscal Responsibility of UP Farm Loan Waiver

(M.K. Vanu, *The Wire*, April 05, 2017)

It must leave no one in doubt that the waiver of small farm loans worth Rs 36,000 crore in Uttar Pradesh will create a cascading impact across many other states where farmers, in acute distress from successive droughts, will want similar relief. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who specifically assured farmers of relief during the UP elections, is now turning a bit coy, with finance minister Arun Jaitley starting to distance himself from the role that the Centre will play in the UP loan waiver. Jaitley is pretending that the loan waiver is Uttar Pradesh's business and will not affect the central fisc. He cannot be more wrong. The loan waiver increases the debt to GDP ratio for the state by nearly 3 percentage points, taking it to about 6% of the state GDP. This is likely to happen to many states which are reeling from successive droughts and similar loan waivers will lead to state fiscal deficits going out of whack. In a sense, this is unavoidable and it is futile for the Centre to pretend this is not affecting the overall fiscal deficit – Centre plus States combined.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/121428/farm-loan-waiver-central-fisc/>

Date Accessed: 05.04.2017

Economy

NPAs: the new wedge in Centre-state relations

(Rajrishi Singhal, *Live Mint*, April 05, 2017)

In the post-1991 era, multiple schemes have been conceived and launched to tackle the menace of NPAs: DRTs (debt recovery tribunals, as suggested by Narasimham Committee-I and then subsequently amended in 2012), CDR (corporate debt restructuring), SARFAESI Act (Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest), CRILC and JLF (Central Repository of Information on Large Credits and Joint Lenders' Forum), 5/25 scheme, ARC restructuring (asset reconstruction companies, formed as a consequence of DRTs), SDR (strategic debt restructuring), AQR (asset quality review), S4A (scheme for sustainable structuring of stressed assets) and finally the IBC (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code).

There are multiple reasons for many of these schemes failing, which include an inadequate legal framework for pursuing resolution; however, the one reason that remains unchanged from pre-reforms period is final policy design always providing corporate borrowers enough protection so that they can reprise the same act all over again.

Read More: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/eKYfhonAVSiv0zsdE1drJL/NPAs-the-new-wedge-in-Centrestate-relations.html>

Date Accessed: 5.4.2017

The next phase of economic reforms

(*Live Mint*, April 05, 2017)

The Prime Minister has spoken about how India should become a \$10 trillion economy by 2032. What are the next generation of economic reforms that India needs to achieve this goal? Can adequate jobs be created in the formal sector during this long transition? How can high growth be maintained in a sluggish global economy? What needs to be done to secure macroeconomic stability over the long run? How can new technology be used to rethink the contract between citizens and the state?

These are not questions for the next quarter or even the next phase of the business cycle. A lot of strategic thought needs to go into the issues before adequate policy is designed. One can find such strategic thinking in the Chinese system. The Planning Commission used to apply its intellectual capital to structural issues before it degenerated into an imperious watchman of spending programmes. The NITI Aayog is now tasked with the job. The Modi government now needs to look beyond its administrative achievements to focus on what economic policy reforms India needs over the next decade.

Read More: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/0d6wKaVDbdyPTI9CJAXMNN/The-next-phase-of-economic-reforms.html>

Date Accessed: 5.4.2017

The Life of Labour: Protests Against Cognizant Layoffs, Wage Agreement at Tata Motors

(Venkat T., Srividya Tadepalli & Thomas Manuel, *The Wire*, April 02, 2017)

The Guardian has a series on slavery as it exists today that covers the abuse of migrant domestic workers in Jordan, an investigation into the abuse of Romanian migrant female farm workers in Italy, a video on rescuing Russian workers held as slaves in brick factories and farms, and a report on murder and slavery in Thailand's fishing industry. Three cases of abuses against Indian workers in Saudi Arabia surfaced in the last two weeks. The first was when Arasukumar, a 30 year-old IT diploma holder, went to Saudi with 29 others but found the job at odds with what they had been promised. When they went to the labour court, they were allegedly locked up by the company and denied food and water. The second case is eerily similar. 29 men were locked for 12 days without food or water for demanding leave to go home. The labour court had ordered that the company give them leave and pay for their travel when they were locked up. They are surviving on the generosity of other Indian labourers.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/120688/workers-rights-labour-news-india/>

Date Accessed: 05.04.2017

Economy

Does the Banking System Really Want to Help Farmers?

(Devinder Sharma, *The Wire*, March 30, 2017)

The Gujarat government gave a loan of Rs 558.58 crore to the Tatas to set up the Nano plant at Sanand, near Ahmedabad. The Gujarat government has acknowledged that the massive loan was given at an interest of 0.1%, to be paid back in 20 years. In other words, this huge loan was virtually an interest free long term loan. In another case, Steel tycoon, Laxmi Narain Mittal, was given Rs 1,200 crore by the Punjab government to invest in the Bathinda refinery. He also got the loan at a 0.1% rate of interest.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/119889/banking-system-farmers-loans/>

Date Accessed: 30.03.2017

Governance & Development

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

PMO tells environment ministry to ease forest clearance rules further

(Mayank Aggarwal, *Live Mint*, April 05, 2017)

After making a series of changes to simplify green clearance rules in the last three years, the office of Prime Minister Narendra Modi now wants the environment ministry to further water down forest clearance rules. The prime minister's office (PMO) also wants the environment ministry to speed up clearance of pending cases and regularly follow up with state governments to push such projects.

The Project Monitoring Group (PMG) mandate includes fast tracking approvals for setting up and commissioning large public, private and -public-private partnership projects. Starting out as a body under the cabinet secretariat in 2013, it was brought under the PMO in September 2015.

Read More: <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/eaILxmXtyIABmX0GqXup9N/PMO-tells-environment-ministry-to-ease-forest-clearance-rule.html>

Date Accessed: 5.4.2017

RTI debate: Don't scare citizens

(*The Economic Times*, April 04, 2017)

A controversy over the government's proposed rules and procedures for the Right to Information (RTI) Act overlooks the simple point that the goal right now should be to move on to a Duty to Publish rather than clean up the working of the RTI Act. The government says that the changes it has proposed were formulated by the previous UPA government and that it is merely taking forward the process started by its predecessor.

Certain of the proposed changes have caused alarm among RTI activists. The provision that an RTI query would lapse if the questioner passes away while the query is being processed certainly could have ominous implications.

Read More: <http://blogs.economictimes.indiatimes.com/et-editorials/rti-debate-dont-scare-citizens/>

Date Accessed: 5.4.2017

Why Adityanath's Drive Against Slaughterhouses is Hasty and Thoughtless

(Vivian Fernandes, *The Wire*, April 03, 2017)

If the idea behind Uttar Pradesh's drive against illegal slaughter of animals is to ensure health, hygiene and sanitation, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanand's administration could have made its intentions clear, simplified the compliances and given time for butchers and slaughterhouses to comply. Instead we see a repeat of the disruption of normal life that we witnessed last November when high value currently notes were pulled out of circulation. It is hard to defend illegality but in this country, and especially in Uttar Pradesh, even those who wish to abide by the law are forced to circumvent it because of onerous regulations and sloth and cussedness of the administration.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/120770/ups-drive-slaughterhouses-hasty-thoughtless/>

Date Accessed: 03.04.2017

CONNECTIVITY

Poor Infrastructure Hobbles Digital India

(*The Economic Times*, April 4, 2017)

The government's vision of making use of internet-enabled services straddling governance, commerce, education, healthcare and finance is laudable. However, to ride on IT, robust infrastructure is a must, namely, telecom connectivity (read: ubiquitous, high-speed broadband) and stable power supply. Given that mobile phone will be a prime mode to move to a digital economy, the government must make available more and cheaper spectrum for mobile use. The need is to ensure that there is no disconnect between goal and policies. Government agencies must implicitly follow the procedures to make the transition to online services

Governance & Development

smooth for every citizen.

Read more: <http://blogs.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/et-editorials/poor-infrastructure-hobbles-digital-india/>

Date Accessed: 05.04.2017

HEALTH

India Gets Serious About Mental Healthcare Provision

(Padmapriya Govindarajan, *The Diplomat*, April 4, 2017)

As March 2017 wound to an end, mental health became an important topic of discussion for Indian ministers, beginning with the passage of the Mental Healthcare Bill 2016 and culminating in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly 'Mann ki Baat' address to the nation, which touched upon the issue of depression. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking of the need for a healthy lifestyle, suggested that a psychologically conducive environment is required to combat depression, which he characterized as not commonly understood and definitely not incurable.

Read More: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/04/india-gets-serious-about-mental-healthcare-provision/>

Date Accessed: 5.02.2017

Centre to soon finalise strategy to end tuberculosis in India by 2025

(*Business Standard*, March 25, 2017)

The minister said the 'Active Case Findings' initiative, which was launched in January in 17 states and covered 50 districts in the first phase to treat TB among vulnerable population groups, will be rolled out in 130 other districts by the end of this year.

Read More: http://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/centre-to-soon-finalise-strategy-to-end-tuberculosis-in-india-by-2025-117032401382_1.html

Date Accessed: 5.04.2017

ENVIRONMENT

We are heading for the warmest climate in half a billion years, says new study

(Gavin Foster, Dana Royer & Dan Lunt, *The Conversation*, April 05, 2017)

Carbon dioxide concentrations are heading towards values not seen in the past 200m years. The sun has also been gradually getting stronger over time. Put together, these facts mean the climate may be heading towards warmth not seen in the past half a billion years.

A lot has happened on Earth since 500,000,000BC – continents, oceans and mountain ranges have come and gone, and complex life has evolved and moved from the oceans onto the land and into the air. Most of these changes occur on very long timescales of millions of years or more. However, over the past 150 years global temperatures have increased by about 1°C, ice caps and glaciers have retreated, polar sea-ice has melted, and sea levels have risen.

Read More: <https://theconversation.com/we-are-heading-for-the-warmest-climate-in-half-a-billion-years-says-new-study-73648>

Date Accessed: 5.4.2017

AGRICULTURE

Farm loan waiver is no solution for Indian agriculture

(*Livemint*, March 27, 2017)

The new Bharatiya Janata Party government in Uttar Pradesh is considering a farm loan waiver as promised in its election manifesto. Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and finance minister Arun Jaitley last week,

Governance & Development

reportedly to seek assistance for a loan waiver for farmers in the state. The Devendra Fadnavis government in Maharashtra is under pressure from its ally, the Shiv Sena, to do the same. It is, perhaps, just a matter of time before more states join the band wagon.

Read More: <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/sppwUbJDGPxoypUZ4SSoVO/Farm-loan-waiver-is-no-solution-for-Indian-agriculture.html>

Date Accessed: 5.04.2017

LAW AND JUSTICE

RTI Debate: Don't Scare Citizens

(The Economic Times, April 5, 2017)

The proposal to limit the size of the question and to raise the RTI fee to Rupees 50 do make sense, to make the process more efficacious and not a burden on the exchequer. But the real reform called for in relation to the citizens' right to know is to move forward on a conceptual rather than merely procedural plane. There is no reason why the government should sit on the details of public decision-making till someone puts in a query. It should proactively publish on its website all its paperwork on the matter in a way that is easily accessible. Information on the working of the government is a powerful source of citizen empowerment. As India's democracy matures, citizens ought to have greater and easier access to that information.

Read more: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170405/jsp/opinion/story_144492.jsp#.WOS36P197IU

Date Accessed: 05.04.2017

Society

GENDER

Make Sure Third Gender Has Public Toilet Access: Centre to States

(Akriti Pracer, *The Quint*, March 27, 2017)

In another attempt to strengthen the role of women in the sanitation programme's planning and implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission, the state governments have been asked by the rural sanitation ministry to ensure at least 50 per cent of the members of the sanitation committee in each village are women.

Read More: <https://www.thequint.com/india/2017/04/05/public-toilets-third-gender-government-access-equal>

Date Accessed: 5.04.2017

Opinions/ Books

OPINIONS

Centre Cannot Avoid Fiscal Responsibility of UP Farm Loan Waiver

(M.K Venu , The Wire, 5 April , 2017)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who specifically assured farmers of relief during the UP elections, is now turning a bit coy, with finance minister Arun Jaitley starting to distance himself from the role that the Centre will play in the UP loan waiver. Jaitley is pretending that the loan waiver is Uttar Pradesh's business and will not affect the central fisc. He cannot be more wrong. The loan waiver increases the debt to GDP ratio for the state by nearly 3 percentage points, taking it to about 6% of the state GDP. This is likely to happen to many states which are reeling from successive droughts and similar loan waivers will lead to state fiscal deficits going out of whack. In a sense, this is unavoidable and it is futile for the Centre to pretend this is not affecting the overall fiscal deficit – Centre plus States combined.

Read More: <https://thewire.in/121428/farm-loan-waiver-central-fisc/>.

Date of Access: 5.4.2017

Minority Report

(Faizan Mustafa, Indian Express, 5 April, 2017)

“Equality to all and appeasement of none” has been the BJP's mantra, though contradictory signals are now visible and strangely, the majority community is presented as a victim of so-called “minority appeasement” even in Gujarat where elections are due in a few months. Minority rights are essential in a democratic, pluralistic polity because as Franklin Roosevelt reminded us, “no democracy can long survive which does not accept as fundamental to its very existence the recognition of the rights of minorities”.

Read More: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/minority-report-4599777/>.

Date of Access: 5.04.2017

Dissent and Trumpisation

(Ramin Jahanbegloo, Indian Express, 5 April, 2017)

The arrival of Donald Trump at the White House and the rise of populist politicians across the globe signal a worrying trend of complacency and conformism among citizens of the world. What we can call the “Trumpisation of politics”, therefore, is not the cause of the erosion of public social trust and crisis of political action, but its severe symptom. A symptom which is pushing the zombified populations of America, Europe and elsewhere into bubbles of protectionism, nativism and exclusion. However, the most tragic part of the story is that the rise of mediocrity and complacency in contemporary political life is accompanied with a loss of dissenting minds among public intellectuals and the remaining gadflies of human civilisation.

Read More: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/dissent-and-trumpisation-donald-trump-white-house-freedom-of-speech-4599779/>.

Date of Access: 5.04.2017

Sinking Ship

(The Telegraph, April 5, 2017)

It is reassuring that the threat of boycott still holds its ground in international diplomacy. The combined pressure of several members of the Organization of American States appears to have prompted the regime of President Nicolás Maduro to roll back its latest assault on democracy. Days ago, the Supreme Court of Venezuela had announced that it would exercise parliamentary powers. This is not the first time that Mr Maduro has acted through the judiciary. The latter has invalidated almost all laws passed by the legislature since 2015, when the Opposition won a majority in Parliament.

Read more: https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170405/jsp/opinion/story_144492.jsp#.WOS36PI97IU

Date Accessed: 05.04.2017

Issue Coordinator: Ms. Wamika Kapur

Connect with RGICS at: info@rgics.org; www.rgics.org



Disclaimer: This document has been prepared by the RGICS staff and has not been seen by the Trustees of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF). Further, the views presented in this document in no way reflect the views of the RGF Trustees.

To unsubscribe, please write to us at info@rgics.org