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Working Paper · November 2006

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Misleading data on the ghost vaccine



Congratulations, your article on Hepatitis-B is well worked out. SP Thyagarajan and others have grossly overestimated in their paper that 4.7 percent of the Indian population is chronically infected with the Hepatitis-B virus. The paper assumes that all those who tested positive for Hepatitis-B are chronic carriers. Using the same data correctly, the actual carrier rate for Hepatitis-B turns out to be only 1.42 percent. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended Hepatitis-B vaccination for all newborns only for countries where the carrier rate is more than two percent.

Similarly, in a paper presented in Himachal Pradesh in 1990, Hepatitis-B prevalence was estimated to be around 3.06 percent, which doesn't appear to be correct, as the sample size was too small. The carrier rate in HP is 0.86 percent as verified from 17,231 blood samples taken throughout the state in 2004. Only 148 of the samples were Hepatitis-B positive. Hence, it appears that the misleading database is going to make our policymakers adopt policies that are not required at the moment. Keeping in mind the WHO recommendations, there is no need for universal immunisation of infants against the virus in HP. We should work out the carrier rate in other states also and decide accordingly. Thanks for carrying an excellent story.

DR OMESH BHARTI, Shimla

ASHAMED TO BE AN INDIAN

The brutal rape and killing of the dalit family in Kherlanji leaves me speechless. It shames me to belong to a country, which has still not woken up and broken free of caste discrimination. It shames me to belong to a country where women are yet to be respected, where the downtrodden can easily be blamed for crimes they never committed, where the rich and powerful get away with crimes, and so openly. It shames me to sit at home curled up on the couch typing away on my laptop, and giving long lectures about what is right and wrong but lack the guts to go to the Bhandara district. The poor and the powerless do not matter. They simply do not exist as human beings. They exist as workers who should be ordered around and dare not have an identity of their own.

MEDHA DUTT, Kolkata

(IMA) and fear that children have been administered ineffective polio vaccines all along. Successive governments irrespective of their political affiliations, have been neglecting their responsibility to provide good, hygienic and sanitary conditions, along with comprehensive health facilities to people in rural areas. Children are administered up to 25 doses of polio vaccine, something unheard of elsewhere in the world.

DR VITULL K. GUPTA, Bhatinda

LAWS FOR THE PEOPLE

The editorial *Our Laws, Our Flaws* (TEHELKA, November 18) has brought out the reasons behind the demolition confusion in Delhi. It is unwise to go on a demolition drive to solve a problem that has accumulated over the years. The human angle and their suffering need to be taken into account. In the same context, your point in the article *Are Courts Turning Against The Poor?* (TEHELKA, November 18) is also relevant. Don't they have easement rights? Laws are for the well-being of the people. The government should find ways to implement a good plan in Delhi.

A. JACOB SAHAYAM, Thiruvananthapuram

In Kherlanji, action should be taken not only against the villagers but also against the sarpanch and Dr AJ Shende, whose post-mortem report reeks of casteism

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE, Faridabad

COALITIONS' CLEAN CANDIDATE

This is with reference to the article, *The Man Who Could Never Keep His Job* (TEHELKA, November 11). Being the defence minister of the world's largest democracy is a daunting task. Given the size of our defence services, one would expect the defence minister to have the right combination of political shrewdness, administrative agility and leadership qualities. There is no transparency in the defence ministry's functioning and it is in urgent need of reform. It is unlikely that any other Central minister would like to be at the helm of this rocking boat. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA chief Sonia Gandhi are trying to put a fresh coat of paint to cover up the ministry's sullied image. Thus, the obvious choice was AK Antony.

AMIT V. SENGUPTA, Kolkata

POLIO DRIVE COMMERCIALISED

Kudos to TEHELKA for critically analysing the failure of the Polio Eradication Initiative (PEI) in the article, *Polio Drive A Success, Says Who?* (TEHELKA, November 11). I definitely agree with the findings of the Indian Medical Association

RESERVATION FOR MUSLIM SCS/STS

With the effective negation of the myth that Muslims are pampered in this country, a concerted effort is needed to bring development to the community. Muslims, like everyone else, want both, to be a part of the economic growth and also contribute to it. Strong affirmative action and reservation is required. Muslim SCS, STs/OBCs must be able to benefit from caste based reservations. But that alone will not solve the problem. The Centre and state governments must build social and economic infrastructure in areas where SCS, STs and Muslims are in a majority. The middle class also must realise that public spheres must be made more inclusive for people from different economic and social backgrounds.

PRANAV SACHDEVA, New Delhi

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT USELESS

This is with reference to *Newspick Violence At Home* (TEHELKA, November 11). The Domestic Violence Act is an additional cap like most laws, which are in favour of women and are not needed at all. Personal and family matters must be kept away from the public. Those men and women that are harassed at home can get justice within a household, making the law useless. When personal relations are made public it further complicates the situation. I seriously doubt the success of the Act.

MAHESH KUMAR, New Delhi