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Hello,

The efforts at Lokniti over the last month have been directed towards the organisation and documentation of data collected during past surveys.

Members of the Lokniti network were also involved in organizing and also participated in several seminars and conferences. Details of the same are given further in the newsletter.

With the Women's Reservation Bill scheduled to be tabled in early March in the legislative houses, debate regarding the proposed constitutional amendment was widespread. A brief summary of the arguments for and against the bill have also been included in this issue.

Thank you

Vanita L. Falcao

❖ **Tabling of Women's Reservation Bill**

The 108th Constitutional Amendment Bill, also known as the Women's Reservation Bill (WRB) that seeks to reserve 33% of seats for women in the legislative houses (at the centre and states) is currently being widely debated.

The WRB first introduced in Parliament in 1996 by the United Front government as the 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill has been a contentious issue for over a decade now.

The general arguments in favour of the WRB are:

- i. A 'critical mass' of women in the legislative houses will provide a political space as well as assertion of their voice, in turn facilitating their political mobilization.
- ii. It will remedy the issue of women having been generally left out by political parties.
- iii. Essentialist argument i.e. since women are less aggressive and more concerned about common good, the sizeable presence of women in the legislatures will lead to a change in the manner of functioning of the house.

The above arguments are contested by those who:

- i. question the primacy of a person's gender identity, and if it takes precedence or can be divorced from one's socio-economic-political identity and interests.

- ii. doubt the effectiveness of the quota system as a means of affirmative action. As well as those who raise concerns about the dangers of nepotism that will be compounded by such an act.
- iii. disagree with the distinction made between same treatment and equal treatment.
- iv. support a "quota within quota" system i.e. the provision for some of the seats already reserved for women being further reserved for OBC women, Muslim women etc... to enable them to reap the benefits of the reservation too.

Most major political parties such as Congress, BJP and CPI(M), are in favour of the bill. However, its passage has been stalled due to stiff opposition by parties such as Samajwadi Party (SP), Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and (by some in the) Janta Dal(U) – who are raising the "quota within quota" demand. Being a constitutional amendment bill a two-third majority in favour of the WRB is required for its successful passage.

The government tabled the WRB in the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha on the 8th of March with the hope that the passage would coincide with the commemoration of International Women's Day, however the disruption of proceedings by some members of both houses resulted in the adjournment of the house. It is yet to be seen if the fourteen year long stalemate surrounding this bill will be broken or not.

❖ 9th Issue of Shodharthy Released



The 9th issue of 'Shodharthy' - a special issue on contemporary political thinkers was released in Kanpur on the 30th of January. The volume was released by the Central Minister Pradeep Jain Aditya, Minister of State for Rural Development at the XVIIIth Convention of the Uttar Pradesh Political Science Association.

The issue was also released at Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota, Rajasthan on 24th February 2010, as well

as at Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur on 6th March, 2010.

The issue discusses the works of political philosophers such as - Bernstein, Gramsci, Hannah Arendt, Simon de Beauvoir, Macpherson, Rawls, Foucault, Habermas, Walzer and Nozick.

This issue was prepared in consultation with Prof. Sanjay Palshikar, Central University, Hyderabad, Prof. Sanjeeb Mukerjee, Calcutta University, Kolkata and Prof. Leela Ram Gurjar, Kota Open University, Kota.

The latest version of Shodharthy has incorporated recommendations of the committee that was set up to review the journal. This committee comprised of Dr. Ujjwal Singh, Delhi University, Dr. Ashutosh Kumar, Punjab University, Prof. R.R. Jha, Benaras Hindu University, Prof. Leela Ram Gurjar, Kota Open University, and Shri Arun Vardhan, formerly with Navbharat Times, Delhi.

❖ Seminar on State of Democracy in North-East India

A three day national seminar on "State of Democracy in North-East India" was organized by the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Assam from the 25th-27th February 2010. The seminar was sponsored by the Special Assistance Programme in collaboration with Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and North-Eastern Regional Centre (NERC). The objective of the seminar was to assess the contribution of the State in deepening and extending democracy in the socio-

economic sphere. The broad themes discussed were:

- i. Democracy and Institutional Legitimacy
- ii. Democratic Representation and Practice
- iii. Democracy as an Area of Participation
- iv. Democracy, Ethnicity and Conflict
- v. Quality of Governance

A total of 28 papers were presented and discussed at the seminar.

❖ **Publications and Other Academic Engagements of Members of the Lokniti Network:**

Banasmita Bora:

- Presented a paper titled "Support base of ULFA in Assam", at a national seminar on "State of Democracy in North –East India" organized by the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Assam from February 25th -27th, 2010.

Biswajit Mohanty:

Book review

- Mohanty, B. 2009 'Beyond Relocation: The Imperative of Sustainable Development by Renu Modi (ed.)'. Social Change, Vol. 39 (4)

Prof. Ashutosh Kumar:

- Made a presentation on 'Political Economy of Reforms: Implications for Federal Democracy in India' at a refresher course in Kurukshetra University on 18th February 2010.
- Presented a paper titled "Assertion of Regions: Demand for New States in India", at a national seminar on "State of Democracy in North –East India" organized by the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Assam from February 25th -27th, 2010.

Book Review

- Kumar, A. 2010 'State Formation and Radical Democracy in India by Manali Desai (2007)'. Contemporary South Asia, Volume 17 (3), 2010. Routledge, London

Mirza Asmer Beg:

- Beg, M.A. 'Muslim quota transgresses Secularism'. The Pioneer 13 Feb. 2010 <http://www.dailypioneer.com/235793/Muslim-quota-transgresses-secularism.html>
- Beg, M.A. 'Over-Generalisation: Bane of the Indian Right'. The Pioneer 20 Feb. 2010 <http://www.dailypioneer.com/237215/Over-generalisation-bane-of-the-Indian-Right.html>
- Beg, M.A. 2010. 'Secularism: The Indian Perspective' in A.R.Kidwai (ed) Higher Education: Issues and Challenges. Viva Books, Delhi.
- Beg, M.A. 2010. 'National Integration: The Indian Experience' in A.R.Kidwai (ed) Higher Education: Issues and Challenges. Viva Books, Delhi.

Sandeep Shastri:

- As a member of the Panel of International Experts of the Forum of Federations (The International Federalism Network) involved in capacity building in federal democracies, Dr Shastri was in Sudan from 3rd-10th February as a Consultant on Political Parties and Federal Democracy. The week long programme included a two day consultation with leaders of political parties in the Sudan and a one day workshop on the same theme for the editors of newspapers. He also held one to one consultations with the leadership of four of the leading political parties in the Sudan.

Rahul Verma:

- Presented a paper titled "Political Mobilization and Electoral Viability of State Autonomy Movement Organizations", at a national seminar on "Assertion of the Regions: Exploring the Demand for New States in India" organised by the Department of Political Science (UGC –SAP and ASIHSS Programmes), Panjab University, Chandigarh from the 22nd-23rd February, 2010.
- Mohanty. B. 2009 'Beyond Relocation: The Imperative of Sustainable Development by Renu Modi (ed.)'. Social Change, Vol. 39 (4)

Sanjay Kumar:

- Kumar, S. 2010 'Jharkhand Assembly Elections: An Analysis, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 45 (7): 24-26.
- Kumar, S. 'License for Quotas?'. Indian Express 15th Feb. 2010 <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/licence-for-quotas/579712/0>
- Kumar, S. 'Endangered Species'. Indian Express 6th Feb. 2010 <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/endangered-species/576336/>
- Made a presentation on 'Social Indicators: How Useful are these as a Tool for Measurement?' at a Pan Asia workshop 'Who Pays, The Global Crises and What Needs to be Done - An Asian Perspective', organised by Social Watch India, Delhi from 22nd-24th February, 2010.

Lectures delivered

- 'Democracy and Political Participation', at Sri Guru Nanak Dev Khalsa College, Delhi on the 24th of February, 2010.

A.K Verma:

- Verma, A.K. 'The Badlands of Bundelkhand'. Indian Express 8th Jan. 2010 <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/the-badlands-of-bundelkhand/564830/0#>

- Trained senior IAS/IPS officers of six districts of Kanpur Division convened by the Commissioner of Kanpur Division on 'New Thoughts and Concepts in Administration' on 29th January 2010.
- Resource person for the 'Technical Words Advisory Committee' meeting of the Ministry of Higher Education, Government of India, on 20th January 2010.

Lectures delivered

- 'Reverse Social Osmosis: Inclusive Politics in Uttar Pradesh', at Academic Staff College, Department of Political Science, Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi on 26th December 2009.
- 'Social Osmosis: Exclusionary Politics in Uttar Pradesh' at Academic Staff College, Department of Political Science, Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi on 26th December 2009.
- 'How to Write a Research Proposal' at Academic Staff College, Department of Political Science', Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh on 26th December 2009.
- 'Writing a Research Paper' at Academic Staff College, Department of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh on 26th December 2009.