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## **Krishi Kalyan Cess comes into force from June 1; eating out, mobile bills set to become expensive**

The Krishi Kalyan Cess of 0.5 per cent, proposed by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley during his budget speech, will come into effect from Wednesday and is expected to make restaurant bills, mobile phones, cinemas, visits to beauty parlours, air travel, insurance, DTH, credit and debit cards, courier, healthcare, banking and professional consultancies costlier.

With this move the government proposes to collect Rs 5,000 crore during the remaining 10 months of the current fiscal.

“I propose to impose a cess called Krishi Kalyan Cess at 0.5 per cent on all taxable services, the proceeds of which would be exclusively used for financing initiatives relating to improvement of agriculture and welfare of farmers,” Jaitley had said in his

budget speech.

KCC to be levied on all taxable services is aimed at financing and promoting initiatives to improve agriculture. The Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) has notified that the Cess will come into force from June 1. The service tax is levied on all services, except a small negative list.

“The levy of KKC will add extra burden on the pockets of service recipient. The levy has already been raised from 12.36 % to 15 % within a span of one year only and will contribute to inflationary pressures,” Amit Maheshwari, Partner, Ashok Maheshwary & Associates told PTI.

Last year, the government had imposed Swachh Bharat Cess of 0.5 % on Service Tax.

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## **Almost 46 million people trapped in slavery with North Korea, India key offenders – global index**

Almost 46 million people are living as slaves globally with the greatest number in India but the highest prevalence of slavery in North Korea, according to the third Global Slavery Index released

on Tuesday.

The index, by Australia-based human rights group Walk Free Foundation, increased its estimate of people born into servitude, trafficked for sex work, or trapped in debt bondage or forced labour to 45.8 million from 35.8 million in 2014.

Andrew Forrest, founder of Walk Free, said the rise of nearly 30 percent was due to better data collection, although he feared the situation was getting worse with global displacement and migration increasing vulnerability to all forms of slavery.

Incidences of slavery were found in all 167 countries in the index, with India home to the largest total number with an estimated 18.4 million slaves among its 1.3 billion population.

But North Korea ranked as worst in terms of concentration with one in every 20 people – or 4.4 percent of its 25 million population – in slavery and its government doing the least to end this with reports of state-sanctioned forced labour.

“We need to make it clear we’re not going to tolerate slavery and when there is slavery in a regime we should not trade with them,” Forrest, an Australian mining billionaire and philanthropist, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“If North Korea objects – and I am sure they will – then I am happy to go there and survey the country and very happy to change the number if we are proved to be wrong.”

## **NUMBERS CRITICISED**

Forrest acknowledged the latest data was likely to attract criticism with some researchers accusing the index of flawed methodology by extrapolating on-the-ground surveys in some

countries to estimate numbers for other nations

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## Obama's nuclear pilgrimage

*The challenge before him is to show he is serious about moving the world as far away as possible from another nuclear weapon being used in anger.*

On May 27, Barack Obama will become the first sitting U.S. President to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Eleven presidents before him have declined to view for themselves the devastation wrought by Enola Gay's deadly payload on that morning of August 6, 1945. The White House has also made it clear that Mr. Obama will not "revisit the decision" taken by President Harry Truman 71 years ago. Nevertheless, his visit will send out a powerfully symbolic message to those wondering if his zeal for nuclear disarmament has died an unmourned death amidst plans by his administration for a \$1 trillion nuclear weapons modernisation programme over the next three decades.

Mr. Obama's complicated relationship with nuclear weapons is hardly unique. Almost sixty years ago, in 1957, Jawaharlal Nehru made what he called a pilgrimage to Hiroshima to meet the Hibakusha, or survivors, the first foreign Head of Government to do so. Standing at the peace memorial he called on the world to "choose between the path of violence symbolised by the atom bomb and the path of peace symbolised by the Buddha". Those who appreciate irony had a field day when India chose to test nuclear weapons on Buddha Jayanti forty-one years later.



Yet human beings are complex creatures. While Nehru campaigned tirelessly for nuclear disarmament – arguably his efforts played a large role in the successful negotiation of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 – he also created the space for India's nuclear weapons programme. The secrecy that sheltered a nuclear weapons

Priyanjali Malik project alongside a civilian programme was put in place by Nehru in 1948 and further strengthened in 1962 in the two Atomic Energy Bills that he shepherded through Parliament into Acts. And yet his abhorrence of the destructive atom was sincere enough.

### **Lower lethality, greater precision**

Similarly, Mr. Obama's 2009 speech in Prague genuinely held out a vision of hope – though one tempered by the sober reminder that achieving a world free of nuclear weapons would take time. He has also negotiated a New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) with Russia in 2010, focussed attention on nuclear security through his Nuclear Security Summits and negotiated Iran away from developing nuclear weapons for now. However, the developments in nuclear modernisation that the U.S. and Russia are undertaking evoke a spectre of a very different future in which nuclear weapons are being made more useable. Worryingly, these trends are being echoed by Pakistan as well as it briskly builds up its nuclear arsenal.

The U.S. is considering an ambitious nuclear modernisation programme. In keeping with Mr. Obama's Prague pledge to make no new nuclear weapons, most of the replacements contemplated revitalise existing bombs by upgrading their targeting mechanisms and renewing their explosive material. Attention has turned to the B61 gravity bomb (the original precision-guided bomb), model 12, the first of five new warhead types that are on the drawing board, which has much greater manoeuvrability and stealth. The yield of this weapon can be adjusted from 0.2 kilotons to 50 kilotons. (The bomb that devastated Hiroshima had a payload of 15 kilotons.) The new version can be aimed with a high degree of accuracy, which its supporters say allows the weapon to be carefully targeted, reducing collateral damage.

There is, however, another view. Reducing the weapon's destructive ability and improving its targeting makes it more likely that the weapon will be viewed by some as more useable, perhaps to the extent of making their first use a matter for reasonable discussion. The fear is that this could be a step towards reviving largely discredited ideas of limited nuclear war.

Further, American attention to tactical nuclear weapons might well encourage Pakistan to continue with its stated intention of developing tactical nuclear weapons, to, as it puts it, "counter Indian aggression". Pakistan's tryst with battlefield nuclear weapons is problematic on a host of fronts – it could threaten strategic stability on the subcontinent; it certainly raises the risk of theft; and it unnecessarily adds another layer of nuclear insecurity to the region. Yet, the U.S. would find itself diplomatically challenged to preach to the Pakistanis not to do as it does.

### **Burgeoning nuclear budgets**

But there is a wider problem here anyway. The eye-watering sums that are reportedly being contemplated for nuclear modernisation appear to undermine any stated commitment by the nuclear weapons states to nuclear disarmament. The Pentagon's budget for next year includes funding for a new air-launched cruise missile that can carry nuclear warheads, the B61-12s, new Ohio class submarines and long-range bombers. According to the Congressional Budget Office, America's nuclear arsenal will cost \$348 billion to upgrade and maintain over the next decade. Russia is reportedly setting aside one-third of its military budget for nuclear modernisation. The U.K. is apparently committed to replacing its current system of nuclear submarines armed with Trident nuclear missiles with a successor system that will cost, according to recent estimates, upwards of 25 billion pounds. One can forgive observers for concluding that given the sums being devoted to nuclear modernisation in the next couple of decades, none of these nuclear weapons states is truly committed to complete nuclear disarmament any time soon.

The challenge before President Obama, even without an apology for what happened in 1945, is to convince the Hibakusha and their families that he is serious about moving the world as far away as possible from another nuclear weapon being used in anger. A good place to start might be with tactical nuclear weapons – with a plan that addresses the fears of making the next generation of nuclear weapons more useable, not less.

*Priyanjali Malik, an independent researcher focussing on security in the Indian subcontinent, is based in London.*

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