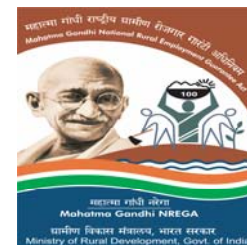


MGNREGS UPDATE

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Foundation for Ecological Security



Smart cards for NREGA, pension beneficiaries

TNN

Mangalore: As part of its financial outreach programme in tune with national priority, city-based private sector Karnataka Bank Limited is all set to launch KBL-Empower Biometric smart card at Babbur in Hiriyur taluk of Chitradurga district on Wednesday. P Jayarama Bhat, managing director of the Bank, will launch the card in the presence of Range Gowda, CEO, Chitradurga ZP who will distribute the card to the beneficiaries.

With this, the bank is participating in the state government's pilot project for smart card payment system (electronic benefit transfer) for National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and social security pension (SSP) beneficiaries covering Bellary, Chitradurga and Gulbarga districts. Under this project the beneficiaries will operate their SB accounts using smart card at remote locations through hand-held machines.

The beneficiaries of NREGA and SSP are being covered under the project through IT-enabled operations of their savings bank accounts. The financial transactions are through business correspondents' services. The Bank has already engaged M/s Integra as the technology provider and M/s i-25 rural mobile commerce services, a section 25 company, as business correspondent, a bank press release here on Monday states.

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The Bank plans to reach out to over 34,000 job cardholders of the NREGA/SSP beneficiaries through its branches in the three pilot districts. Under its financial inclusion plan, the Bank has drawn its roadmap to provide banking services in 78 un-banked villages across India, through business correspondent model using biometric smart cards, covering a population of over 2.50 lakh through its branches by March 31, 2012.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mangalore/Smart-cards-for-NREGA-pension-beneficiaries/articleshow/6770420.cms>

‘NREGA swindlers must face the music’

Staff Reporter/ October 17, 2010

Shillong: Any Village Employment Council (VEC) member responsible for swindling funds under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is liable for prosecution under the Act.

“Provisions in the Act allow the Government to prosecute any VEC member found swindling funds under the scheme,” a senior official of the NREGA Cell told The Shillong Times on Friday.

Before proceeding with the prosecution, the concerned individual is asked to refund the swindled amount within a month’s time, he said. If he fails to do so, he will be taken to task as per the law.

However, many such cases have actually been resolved within the community itself, the source admitted.

Citing an example about a village in Ri-Bhoi district, the senior official said there was case where the Chairman and Secretary of the VEC had swindled Rs 1.27 Lakh.

“This came into light after the new VEC chairman cross-checked the accounts and found that the former VEC chairman and Secretary had swindled the funds,” he informed.

The new chairman immediately asked the two to refund the money within one month.

At the meeting, both agreed to refund the stolen funds. The chairman had actually taken only Rs 3000; the secretary had swindled the rest. The latter then refunded the amount in installments since it was huge.

The senior official also informed of a village in Garo Hills where one VEC member stood up on his own before a large gathering for swindling Rs 7000 from the funds. “The concerned person promised not to commit such a mistake again.”

He however informed that there was another interesting incident in one of the village in Jaintia Hills.

In another interesting development, another VEC chairman withdrew Rs 1 Lakh from the scheme fund. The following day, he reported to the police that the amount was “stolen”. During investigations, it was discovered the chairman was trying to swindle the amount by saying that it was stolen from him. “Actually, the amount was inside the drawer of the chairman,” the official added.

Regarding the Jongksha incident, the social audit report clearly states the VEC has not been able to maintain proper accounts of the various projects implemented in the village.

“The VEC members are liable for punishment once it is proven they have swindled the funds,” another official added.

It may be reminded the social audit report of schemes under NREGS implemented during 2008-2009 in Jongksha exposed many irregularities committed by the VEC while implementing the scheme.

One of the irregularities pointed out in the report is that the cash memo submitted showed 126 truck loads of stones as procured; however, the actual amount according to the daily wage labourers was not more than 40 trucks.

<http://www.neinews.com/nrega-swindlers-must-face-the-music.html>

Youth Cong protests over "poor" implementation of NREGA in J-K

PTI/ October 18, 2010

Jammu: The Jammu and Kashmir Youth Congress Committee today held a demonstration against the alleged failure of the state government in effectively implementing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Led by party vice-president R S Pathania, over 700 activists raised slogans and held demonstrations at the Deputy Commissioner's office in Samba. Pathania claimed the Centre's flagship job-guarantee scheme has failed to achieve the desired results in the trouble-torn state where unemployed youth have taken to guns and stones. "Although the Act has made provisions for imposition of penalties, there is no authority which can be approached to seek penalties against erring officers," he said. Pathania said lesser rate of wages with no provision of higher wages for skilled labourers, paucity of staff, lack of proper social audit mechanism through Gram Panchayats and failure to put in place proper monitoring devices were some of the factors which have affected the scheme. He also demanded that the wage rate be enhanced to Rs 200 from Rs 110 per day. Pathania also called for payment of wages to labourers through post offices as they are easily accessible in villages.

<http://ibnlive.in.com/generalnewsfeed/news/youth-cong-protests-over-poor-implementation-of-nrega-in-jk/424745.html>

State govt writes to Centre for enhancing NREGS wages

TNN/ October 19, 2010

Jaipur: The state government has written to the Centre for enhancing the wages for MGNREGS workers so as to meet the revised minimum wages given in the state. The government's letter follows constant demand by the mazdoor satyagrahis, who have been on a dharna near the Statue Circle for the past 17 days, for ensuring that

Initiative towards Energizing MGNREGA.

the NREGA is also governed by the Minimum Wages Act.

The letter, addressed to the Union rural development secretary, has been written by C S Rajan, principal secretary, rural development department. The letter, while pointing out that the consumer price index has increased by 924 points between January 2008 to June 2010, says that despite this, there has been no increase in wages for NREGS workers.

"The state government in a meeting held on September 29 has enhanced the minimum wages of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labourers from the present level of Rs 100, Rs 107 and Rs 115 to Rs 135, Rs 145 and Rs 155, respectively, the letter says. "Since these revised minimum wages have become applicable in all government and private works, the same needs to be made applicable to NREGS workers too," the letter said.

However, the letter puts the ball to the Centre's court and reminds it that these rates will become applicable for NREGS workers only when the Centre notifies the same. "Since the wages for unskilled manual workers under NREGS is borne entirely by the Union government as per Section 21 (i) (a) of the NREG Act, it is requested that the minimum wage rate, as finalised by the state government, may be notified by the Union government at the earliest," the letter says, urging the Centre to bear the entire increased wage burden.

The letter also asks the Centre to link the wages for NREGS with the minimum wages of the state. However, the letter also claims that despite this increase in wages, there would be no increased burden on the Centre as the "actual average wage is always lower than the prescribed minimum wage rate."

The letter has brought a smile on the faces of the satyagrahis but they have warned that it is irrelevant as to who pays the money but till such time the increased wages for NREGS is not notified, their agitation would

continue. "The state, by writing to the Centre, has cleverly thrown the ball into their court," said Nikhil Dey of the Suchna Evum Rozgar Ka Abhiyan which is spearheading the agitation.

"Though the state and the Centre have both accepted that the NREGS wages must be linked to the price index and should abide by the Minimum Wages Act, but each is putting the onus on the other. And caught in the middle are the labourers. Therefore our agitation will continue," said Kamal Tonk, an activist.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/State-govt-writes-to-Centre-for-enhancing-NREGS-wages/articleshow/6771561.cms>

Govt keen to rope in IIM, IIT pupils for rural dev programmes

PTI/ October 19, 2010

New Delhi: The government is keen on forging a partnership with IIMs, IITs and other select institutes for augmenting professional resource support to its rural development programmes like NREGA.

As part of efforts to evolve such a framework, the Ministry of Rural Development has invited representatives from various professional institutes including IIMs and IITs to participate in a workshop organised by it in Udaipur district of Rajasthan tomorrow, a ministry official said.

Union Minister for Rural Development C P Joshi will chair the event.

The Ministry had recently suggested that the states appoint at least four dedicated staff in each panchayat, of whom one should be an MBA degree holder and another an engineer, promising that it will provide them funds to meet initial expenditure on salaries for eight years.

"Ministry desires that professional institutes including IIMs and IITs design a matching curriculum in their courses to encourage young professionals towards the emerging opportunity in the area of rural development.

This will be discussed with them tomorrow," the official said.

The students can undertake internship to associate themselves with process. "This will be mutually benefited as the academic youth of the country will acquire exposure to issues related to rural development and grass root development process will be strengthened through professional support," he added.

There are other areas too where Ministry wants a "partnership" with these select professional institutes and they will be discussed with their representatives during the workshop.

NREGA envisages detail participatory micro level planning and handholding to ensure quality works. This is an area where professional institutions can contribute "considerably", the official said.

Action research, awareness generation and capacity building are also areas where professional institutes can contribute to improving the quality of implementation of the programmes. "These issues will be discussed with them at tomorrow's workshop," he added.

The Ministry has already involved professional institutes like IIMs, IITs and central universities in programme appraisal for independent quality assessment of the schemes and recommendations for policy reforms.

"This network needs to be further broadened and deepened," the official said adding that the outcome of the workshop will help the Ministry in evolving a framework of national collaboration with the "leading" professional institutes for making rural development schemes including NREGA more effective.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/jobs/Govt-keen-to-rope-in-IIM-IIT-pupils-for-rural-dev-programmes/articleshow/6776750.cms>

NREGA wages fight gathers steam

Anindo Dey/ October 21, 2010

Jaipur: Seventy-year-old Dau Singh is dancing to the tune of a parody music being belted out in the background by a group of people sitting on the pavement. The song urges people to write letters to their brethren and come there to join the fight. "Come on mazdoors, get into the act to get what you deserve," urges the song. The venue is the Statue Circle in Jaipur, where hundreds of people from villages of the state are sitting on an indefinite dharna demanding a revised minimum wage for NREGA workers.

A speaker, Lakhan Salvi, ensured that he did not mince a word. "It is a fight for self-respect. You deserve to be paid the minimum wages even for NREGA. But beware! We have already got feelers that nothing may happen with this satyagrah. So all of you plan your next step to ensure that you get your rights," Lakhan blared through the public address system.

At stake is the UPA government's flagship programme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Though petitions have been filed at Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka high courts by individuals and workers' groups questioning the competence of the Union government to fix wages under NREGA — which is less than the wages prescribed under Minimum Wages Act — the ground battle is now being fought in the capital of Rajasthan.

"If the minimum wages is undermined, then NREGA loses its meaning. One aspect of the Act was to ensure jobs for the unemployed, the other aspect was to ensure that they get the due value. In fact, it was NREGA which had ensured that the minimum wages are paid to workers but not paying the minimum wage is not only unconstitutional, but no one would be willing to work under it even if they get higher wages elsewhere," says social activist Aruna Roy of the Suchna Evum Rozgar Ka Adhikar Abhiyan, which is heading the satyagrah.

Currently, the wages for NREGA is governed by Section 6 of the Act and the Union ministry of rural development has been maintaining that the section is immune from the Minimum Wages Act. In fact, in response to a recommendation by the Working Group on Wages—formed under the National Employment Guarantee Council — to raise the minimum wage, the ministry has said: "This is not feasible. The wage rates fixed under Section 6 (1) of the Act are distinct from the minimum wages. The provisions of the Act have to be respected."

Earlier, on an order of the Andhra Pradesh High Court in a petition filed by one Karri Sanyasi Naidu against the government of India, the ministry said, "...the state government is obliged to pay the minimum wages as notified by the Minimum Wages Act 1948. However, the government of India will reimburse the amount to the extent permissible under Section 6 (1) of the NREG Act." This was stated by Satyendra Kumar Singh, director, NREGA, in the court.

This stance of the Centre put the onus of paying the extra sum to the NREGA worker onto the state governments which they are refusing to buy.

In Rajasthan, after 17 days of sit in by the activists the government accepted that the NREGA wages should meet criteria of a minimum wage but instead of taking a stand on it just wrote to the Centre for the same.

"It might well be a correct position that the Centre should pay the whole amount when it is a Central scheme. Especially since Section 22 (1) of the NREGA clearly states that the wage component must be entirely paid by the Centre," asserts Nikhil Dey, another activist of the Abhiyan, adding, "in this battle between the two, it is again the poor NREGA worker who is the sufferer. The courts have consistently held that minimum wages are a Fundamental Right. How can anyone say that a section of the MGNREGA gives them the authority to

overrule the most basic protection for workers of the unorganised sector?"

When contacted, C P Joshi, Union rural development minister said, "The Sections 6 (1) and (2) of the NREG Act is very clear on the issue of wages. Whatever legal opinions are being given for making these wages at par with the minimum wages, are subject to scrutiny of the courts. However, the government understands that prices of goods have gone up and that is why the wages for NREGA workers has been increased from the initial sum of Rs 60 that was paid in the year 2000. This apart, on the issue of indexing the wages, the matter is pending with the Planning Commission. As soon as it clears, it will be taken up with the finance ministry."

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/NREGA-wages-fight-gathers-steam/articleshow/6784181.cms>

Smart cards launched

TNN/ October 20, 2010

Chitradurga: Karnataka Bank on Wednesday launched its smart cards under its financial inclusion programme at Babbur in Chitradurga district. The card can be used for payments under various state-run programmes including NREGA and social security pension (SSP).

P Jayarama Bhat, managing director of the bank, explained the bank's participation in the government's pilot project for payments under smart card system (electronic benefit transfer) through KBL-Empower Biometric, for social security pension (SSP) beneficiaries.

Sridhar, business representative who demonstrated the working of the hand-held machine, explained how the beneficiaries could operate their SB accounts using smart card at remote locations.

Range Gowda, CEO, zilla panchayath, B Ashok Hegde, GM of Karnataka Bank, V K Bhatt, chief manager, H C Rudraiah zonal officer and H P R Hande were present.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hubli/Smart-cards-launched/articleshow/6782425.cms>

Rs 59-lakh cashew scheme in Golaghat

Wasim Rahman/ October 21, 2010



Golaghat: A project to undertake cashewnut plantation on a large scale has been initiated under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) at Nahardunga under Kakodonga block near National Highway 37 of Golaghat district.

Koliabar MP Deep Gogoi formally launched the Rs 59-lakh project on September 28.

Cashewnut saplings will be planted across 27 bighas of land with funds sanctioned by NREGA.

The entire area has been divided into 12 plots with each measuring 100 metres in length and 30 metres in width.

The Kakodonga development block will implement the scheme for a year and then Sitalpathar gaon panchayat will take over.

The profit earned from selling the nuts for the next five years would go to the gaon panchayat.

Talking to The Telegraph about the scheme, Golaghat deputy commissioner H.N. Bora, the man behind the initiative, said he thought of it following a discussion with MP Deep Gogoi, who wanted a scheme that could be a model for local upcoming entrepreneurs and also generate employment.

Bora said the feasibility report of the horticulture department of Assam Agricultural University (AAU) stated that the climate of the northeastern region was

suitable for cultivation of cashewnut in highland areas if there was no water deposition.

Hence, the administration decided to implement the project under NREGA.

He said the scheme would be implemented under the guidance and supervision of scientists of the horticultural department of the AAU.

Bora said the advantage of planting cashewnuts was that the nut was not eaten by birds or insects as the lump holding the nuts acted as repellents.

Project in-charge, Sanjib Mudoi, a junior engineer of the Kakodonga development block, said the scheme was expected to provide an employment of 17,640 man-days to job-card holders within a year and for that purpose, an amount of Rs 17.64 lakh would be paid as daily wages.

A labourer is paid Rs 100 per day, employed for a maximum period of 90 days in a financial year under NREGA.

Mudoi said ploughing of the land by tractors was underway and saplings would be planted by the end of this month.

He said according to the project report, an amount of Rs 4.99 lakh would be spent for each of the 12 plots, including the cost of buying saplings, fencing, fertilisers and water supply.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1101022/jsp/northeast/story_13037122.jsp

Dr. C.P. Joshi Inaugurates Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra at Rajasamand in Rajasthan

Staff Reporter/ October 21, 2010

The Union Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister Dr. C. P. Joshi inaugurated today one of the Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendras in Rajasthan at Panchayat Samiti in Rajsamand today. To be developed at a cost of Rs. 25 lakhs, it will have services of seven computer operators to update the

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records. Addressing a gathering on this occasion, Dr. Joshi said that this is one of the important steps towards fulfilling the dreams of the former Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi who wanted to usher in information technology revolution in the rural India. The Minister said that the Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra will act as the village knowledge resource centre and help in ensuring that the benefits of development reach out to the needy and the poor in rural areas. It would be a forum for the village people to interact and exchange their experiences and would provide logistic support and record keeping facility. It will also help in efficient implementation of MGNREGA at Panchayat and Block level and in providing space for greater and more transparent interaction with the local people.

The Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra (BNRGSK) is to be used for providing space for citizens to exercise their rights under MGNREGA, specially, i) Submit applications for job cards, ii) Submit applications for work, iii) Muster roll scrutiny iv) Complaints v) Use ICT facilities for scrutinizing their rights and entitlements under MGNREGA. A section of the building will be dedicated towards facilitating interactions with MGNREGA workers and local communities. It will also providing space for establishing a dedicated office for MGNREGS at the GP and block levels.

The Construction of Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra as Village Knowledge Resource Centre and Gram Panchayat Bhawan at Gram Panchayat level has been provided for as a permissible activity under MGNREGS by a Notification dated 11.11.2009. The source of funding for the construction of Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendras is as follows :(i) For the BRGF districts—the material component may be met from BRGF and the labour component from NREGS. In case, the material resource support from BRGF is inadequate, the same can be incurred under NREGS

provided the material component does not exceed 40% at the district level.(ii) For the non-BRGF districts, NREGS would be the main source. The material component can also be supplemented by other schemes.
<http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=66491>

Nomadic tribes extend support to NREGS workers

TNN/ October 22, 2010

Jaipur: For the first time, the ongoing Mazdoor Satyagrah at Statue Circle here, brought together various nomadic and marginalised communities in the state on a common platform on Thursday.

Representatives from the Kalbeliya, Garia Lohar, Banjara, Kherua and other communities came together, sharing the platform with NREGS workers demanding minimum wages.

"These are communities that don't even have an identity card to prove themselves, a proper residential facility, schools for their children or even basic amenities. In the absence of these, they don't have a job card and fail to get job under the NREGS," said Kamal Tonk, an activist of the Suchna Evum Rozgar Ka Adhikar Abhiyan.

The congregation not only became a stage for the first such meeting but also the crowd assembled at the venue could get to know the problems faced by the community as individual members came up for sharing their experience.

Giving them an ear was Sayeeda Hameed, member, Planning Commission, who was on her way back to Delhi from Bharatpur. "I am lucky to have made a stopover, else I would not have come to know of these basic problems being faced by you," she said. "These are absolutely basic problems and need to be addressed. I will take up your problems and give them to the prime minister's office. There is a need to create more awareness on these issues faced by them. It will be a big

loss for the government if they don't address these issues," she said.

There is also a demand for a nodal officer for each such tribe so as to get their problems addressed and also for land rights so that the members of the community can set up their home. "There should be a boarding school too to ensure that their children get education when their parents are not around," added Nikhil Dey of the Abhiyan.

Later, a delegation also met chief secretary S Ahmed. It was also decided to form a state-wide forum of representatives of these communities so that they can have meetings periodically and come up with the problems facing them. The issues would then be addressed by Aditi Mehta, principal secretary, social justice and empowerment.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/Nomadic-tribes-extend-support-to-NREGS-workers/articleshow/6789541.cms>

Mahatma Gandhi NREGA beneficiaries completing 100 days of work in Bhilwara felicitated by Dr. C P Joshi

Staff Reporter/ October 23, 2010

Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has been bringing not only economic benefits but also adding to the self reliance of the rural people across the country. Many of the beneficiaries have completed full 100 days guaranteed employment under the scheme.

Union Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister Dr. C P Joshi facilitated today 30 years old Sita Devi, a scheduled caste labourer in Dhuvala village in Aasind Tehsil of Bhilwara district in Rajasthan. The mother of two kids was not only benefited economically but also converted her Kutcha house into a Pucca Ghar from the remuneration received under the scheme. Dr. Joshi praised her effort and said that her example is the role model for the rural poor across the country, who with their resolve and determination, can withstand against

all the odds. He said that Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has been a catalyst for economic empowerment of the rural people.

<http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=66524>

Minimum Wages Act for NGNREGA too: NAC

Anindo Dey/ October 25, 2010

Jaipur: The National Advisory Council (NAC) headed by Sonia Gandhi has endorsed the proposal of the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) that the Minimum Wages Act be adhered to even for workers under MGNREGA. The NAC endorsement came on Saturday during its meeting in New Delhi. Earlier on Saturday, during a meeting of the sub-group of the CEGC, attended by representatives from about six states, the issue of minimum wages being paid to NREGS workers was taken up. Sources said that all the states were of the view that the Centre should pay the excess sum to meet the criteria of the minimum wages. "The proposal had come to the NAC during its meeting. The NAC endorsed it. But the issue on how the payment will be made or who will make it will be resolved later," said Aruna Roy, member NAC. The states and the Centre have been at loggerheads even while agreeing that the Minimum Wages Act is to be followed in NREGA. But while the states has been asking the Centre to make the payment, the Centre has said it was state's onus of meeting the Minimum Wages Act and so they should make the payment. "Over the next few days the issue would be taken up with the various ministries involved in it and a consensus would be arrived at," sources said adding that a committee may be set up for the purpose. The NAC also endorsed the fact that rules of the MGNREGA be amended so that outside parties may be allowed for the social audit of the NREGS. Currently, Section 13 (b) of the Act allows only gram sabha to do a social audit of the scheme and keep any outsiders at

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bay.

Sources also said that the conflict between the two sections on payment of wages in NREGA, Section 6 (1) and (2) would also be resolved. "But till such time wages would be paid under Section 6 (2)," sources said. The issue of NREGS workers being paid minimum wages has been gathering steam not only with petitions being filed from individuals from other states but a host of activists under the banner of the Rozgar Evum Suchna Ka Adhikar Abhiyan have been staging a sit in near the Statue Circle here since October 2.

The NAC also decided to put an end to manual scavenging by 2012 in the country. "Manual scavenging at every place has to be stopped, whatever the cost be. In the Railways too the practice will have to be stopped even if it means setting up costly chemical toilets," Roy said.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/Minimum-Wages-Act-for-NGNREGA-too-NAC/articleshow/6806040.cms>

Centre and states labour over NREGA wage fineprint

Seema Chishti/ October 25, 2010

New Delhi: The Centre and states may vie to take credit for the MNREGS, but when it comes to footing the Bill for the job guarantee scheme, the story is different. Asking the Centre to notify new, revised wage rates "at the earliest" is, interestingly, a Congress-ruled state—Rajasthan. It also happens to be the home state of minister for rural development C P Joshi. Rajasthan principal secretary CS Rajan last week sent a letter to the secretary, rural development, underlining that as per the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), the Centre must bear the cost of wages, which must be the minimum wages applicable in the state. So, Rajasthan argued, the Centre must notify new, revised wage rates "at the earliest" so that MNREGA

workers could be paid at least the minimum wages paid to other workers in the state. The reason for the letter was the recent upward revision of the minimum wage in the state.

The Centre may not be in a hurry to oblige, going by a letter it sent to Andhra Pradesh in September 2009. The letter had stated that it was the state's responsibility to pay salaries to workers over and above the Rs 100 wage fixed for MNREGA workers.

Fixing this rate has been a point of contention between those who argue that the MNREGA cannot overrule the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, and those who say that the Centre is well within its rights to do so, as it is only a baseline of Rs 100 that the Centre can pay. All variations from then on must be met by the state in question, the latter argue.

Says Nikhil Dey of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan: "There is an interim order of the Andhra Pradesh High Court of July 2009, that has set aside the Centre's notification freezing the level of wages at Rs 100, and restoring the primacy of the minimum wage of the state. The legal opinion given on this matter by Indira Jaisingh too clearly says that the Minimum Wages Act cannot be overridden by any legislation, including the MNREGA."

The Central Employment Guarantee Council's Committee on Wages, headed by activist Jean Dreze, in a report in July this year, termed the status of wage-payments being made to MNREGA workers having reached a 'crisis' point and needing immediate redressal.

In a set of 32 recommendations, the committee made a strong plea for pegging the wages given to MNREGA workers to the cost of living.

<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/centre-and-states-labour-over-nrega-wage-fineprint/701952/2>

NREGS stir takes up bonded labourers' cause

TNN/ October 28, 2010

Jaipur: The recent thrashing by his new owner' was the most that Om Prakash was willing to take. Ten years of serving as bonded labour at Nayapura in Baran came to an end for the youth as he headed straight for the sit-in near Statue Circle crying for justice.

"I migrated from Madhya Pradesh along with my wife and mother-in-law about 10 years ago looking for employment in Rajasthan. Failing to get anything, I borrowed Rs 4,000 from one Hansraj and, in return, I was to work for him," recalled Om Prakash.

But that was just the beginning of his sorrows. For, he was made to do all kinds of work in the household and at the field and was paid just Rs 200 per month and given 25 kg of wheat in lieu.

"I worked there as nothing else came my way even after a long stay here. When the NREGS was floated, I approached the panchayat but they refused to make a job card for me as I was from Madhya Pradesh though I have been staying in Rajasthan for many years now," he said.

His misery continued with Hansraj selling Om Prakash off to younger brother Chauthal about 7-8 months back for just Rs 11,000. Last Saturday, he fell ill and could not go to work. However, the brothers thrashed him black and blue and asked him to start working immediately.

"I have paid Rs 11,000 for you, so you better get back to work," Chauthal told Om Prakash. When the workers asked what would they take to let him go, the brothers demanded Rs 30,000 for his freedom.

"This is just a case in example of how in many villages in the state a nexus between the panchayats and some land mafia exist. Because the land mafia wants workers for their field, they get in touch with the panchayat and refuse to make job cards for them. As a result, they are forced to work as bonded labours," said Nikhil Dey, an

office bearer of Suchna Evum Rozgar Ka Adhikar Abhiyan.

The Abhiyan has been staging the sit-in since October 2 demanding that the NREGS be governed by the Minimum Wages Act. But the organisation is also using the platform to bring forth many other issues concerning the fundamental rights of oppressed people. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/NREGS-stir-takes-up-bonded-labourers-cause/articleshow/6824938.cms>

Chattisgarh RD Minister Ram Vichar Netam Calls on Rural Development Minister

Staff Reporter/ October 29, 2010

Government is committed to extend its full co-operation in the effective implementation of programs of Rural Development in Left Wing Extremism affected districts including those in Chattisgarh. The assurance came during a meeting when the Chattisgarh RD Minister Ram Vichar Netam called on Dr. Joshi at Krishi Bhawan here today. Regarding the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in the state, Dr. Joshi advised that the State Government should expedite the ongoing and remaining projects for construction and up gradation of roads in rural areas as per the detailed project reports (DPR).

In response to the request of the Chattisgarh Government regarding the non payment or delays in payment of wages to MGNREGA workers due to unavailability of banks and post offices in the remote, tribal and naxal affected districts, the Minister said the state Government should explore various innovative options such as Business Correspondents or tie ups with Co-operative Banks or Grameen Banks. Dr. Joshi called upon the state Government to continue the dialogue with the people to address their needs for development . The progress of Centrally sponsored Rural Development Schemes specially the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and the issues related to the

Initiative towards Energizing MGNREGA.

implementation of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA in the state figured prominently in the meeting.

<http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=66654>

'Black Diwali' for NREGA workers in Rajasthan

NDTV Correspondent/ October 31, 2010

Jaipur: Salaries of MPs, MLAs and bureaucrats have seen huge hikes recently but for workers under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), wages have remained static ever since the scheme was launched five years ago.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot recently announced a Diwali bonus for the government employees in the state.

"For Diwali we have decided to give bonus equal to 30 days salary. This will cost us Rs. 223 crore and it will cover six lakh government employees of our state," he said.

This announcement might have thrilled the government employees but it's almost like rubbing salt into the wounds of lakhs of NREGA workers in the state.

NREGA, the UPA's (United Progressive Alliance) flagship program to combat rural poverty began five years ago but shockingly, wages of the workers under the NREGA have been unchanged.

For nearly a month, they've been on a Dharna to demand a minimum wage of Rs. 135 a day. However, the government has refused to budge, claiming a financial crunch.

Unwilling to tolerate the government insensitivity any longer, the workers have now decided to observe a "Black Diwali".

"After a full day's work, we get just Rs. 100 as wage. But we can't even feed our children properly through that. So how can we celebrate Diwali? It's only government employees who can celebrate the festival," said one of the NREGA workers.

So far, the plight of these workers has failed to move both the central as well as the state governments. The Gehlot government has done little to support the workers' demand besides writing a letter to the Centre where ironically, the Rural Development Minister CP Joshi is also from Rajasthan.

"The state government says it doesn't have money for NREGA workers but they are giving bonus to their employees. And the Centre says the same but they've hiked DA for central employees by 10%. Both governments are trying to pass the responsibility to each other, our workers are being tossed around like a football," says Nikhil De, Social Activist.

If both the governments continue to dither in the same manner, Diwali this time will indeed be a dark one for the NREGA workers.

<http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/black-diwali-for-nrega-workers-in-rajasthan-63549>

Gehlot assured to write to PM on NREGS wages, says NGO

TNN/ October 31, 2010

Jaipur: The Suchna Evum Rozgar Ka Adhikar Abhiyan, which has been spearheading a satyagrah at the Statute Circle for nearly a month, met chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Saturday seeking his intervention for a revision in the wages paid under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The Abhiyan wants the MGNREGS wages to be increased from the existing Rs 100 per day to at least Rs 135 per day, which is the minimum wage rate fixed for unskilled labourers by the state government.

Since it is being debated as to who the Centre or the State should bear the additional burden if MGNREGS wage rate were increased, the chief minister is believed to have agreed to take up the issue with the prime minister. "The chief minister assured us that he will be

writing to the prime minister to resolve the matter," Nikhil Dey, a leader of the Abhiyan told TOI. Principal secretary, panchayati raj and rural development, CS Rajan, has already written to the Centre on the matter. Dey reasoned that the workers should not be made to suffer in the Centre-state debate about whose responsibility it was to make the payment.

Earlier in the day, thousands of MGNREGS workers took out a rally from the Statue Circle to the Collectorate Circle on Saturday to press for their demands and highlight the issue of corruption in the employment scheme. After the rally a delegation, including activists Aruna Roy and Dey, met the chief minister and the chief secretary S Ahmed separately with their demands.

The Abhiyan leaders laid special emphasis on demanding government action against those found prima facie guilty of misappropriating the MGNREGS funds. "We want action on those found guilty of misappropriation in the audits of 31 panchayats and in the computers-purchase deal," said Dey. The chief minister assured of having a separate meeting with the activists and the government officials on these issues.

Further, the Abhiyan registered strong protest against the Gehlot government's decision to increase a sarpanch's cash holding limit from Rs 1000 to Rs 10,000 for MGNREGS works. "This is ridiculous; it will increase corruption by the sarpanches. The chief minister has assured us to look into this aspect also," said Dey.

Other issues that were raised with the chief minister and the chief secretary by the activists included registering police complaints of the 16 bonded labourer families from Baran district and releasing compensation to MGNREGS workers whose payments were delayed.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/Gehlot-assured-to-write-to-PM-on-NREGS-wages-says-NGO/articleshow/6843871.cms>

This information bulletin is a part of our initiative towards energizing NREGA. This initiative is supported by Concern World Wide, India.



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