

Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme

- The story so far: The Indira Gandhi Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme has rolled out in Rajasthan with the objective of providing economic support to the poor and needy families living in the cities through work to be provided on demand for 100 days in a year.

Who are eligible to get jobs?

- Those in the age group of 18 to 60 years residing within the limits of urban local bodies are eligible to demand and get employment in the identified segments.
- There is no income limit, though the poor and destitute people, especially those who lost their livelihood during the pandemic, will be given preference.

What are the categories of tasks?

- The tasks to be carried out under the scheme have been clubbed mainly under eight heads.
- The first is environment protection, which will involve tree plantation at public places, maintenance of parks and watering plants on footpaths and dividers.

- The next is water conservation, where the tasks may be allotted for cleanliness and improvement of ponds, lakes and stepwells, construction, repair and cleaning of rain water harvesting structures and restoration of water sources.
- Other categories are heritage conservation, removal of encroachments and illegal boards, hoardings and banners, stopping defacement of property and service-related works.
- As part of convergence, the people engaged under the employment guarantee scheme can be employed elsewhere in other schemes, already having a material component, which require the labour.
- Eligible people will get work such as tree plantation, cleaning ponds, collecting garbage from door to door and segregating it and catching stray animal.
- Several States are looking favourably towards an urban version of MGNREGA.
- These schemes include the Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme in Kerala, Urban Wage Employment Initiative under UNNATI in Odisha, Mukhya Mantri Shramik Yojana in Jharkhand and Mukhya Mantri Yuva Swabhiman Yojana in Madhya Pradesh.

Child Adoption

- The story so far: From September 1, District Magistrates (DM) have been empowered to give adoption orders instead of courts. All cases pending before courts have to be now transferred.

What do the amended rules say?

- How did they come about? The Parliament passed the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Bill, 2021 in July last year in order to amend the Juvenile Justice Act (JJ Act), 2015.
- The key changes include authorising District Magistrates and Additional District Magistrates to issue adoption orders under Section 61 of the JJ Act by striking out the word court. This was done “in order to ensure speedy disposal of cases and enhance accountability,” according to a government statement.
- The District Magistrates have also been empowered under the Act to inspect child care institutions as well as evaluate the functioning of district child protection units, child welfare committees, juvenile justice boards, specialised juvenile police units, child care institutions etc. d “court”.
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- The amendments to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016 say, “all the cases pertaining to adoption matters pending before the Court shall stand transferred to the District Magistrate from the date of commencement of these rules.”
- The revised rules have parents, activists, lawyers, and adoption agencies worried as cases already before courts for the past several months will have to be transferred and the process will have to start afresh.
- The Central Adoption Resource Authority says there are nearly 1,000 adoption cases pending before various courts in the country.

What is the adoption procedure in India? What are the challenges?

- Adoptions in India are governed by two laws the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 (HAMA) and

the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. Both laws have their separate eligibility criteria for adoptive parents.

- Those applying under the JJ Act have to register on CARA's portal after which a specialised adoption agency carries out a home study report.
- After it finds the candidate eligible for adoption, a child declared legally free for adoption home referred to the applicant.
- Under HAMA, a "dattaka hom" ceremony or an adoption deed or a court order is sufficient to obtain irrevocable adoption rights.
- But there are no rules for monitoring adoptions and verifying sourcing of children and determining whether parents are fit to adopt.
- There are many problems with the adoption system under CARA but at the heart of it is the fact that there are very few children in its registry.

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Crisis of Apple farmer

- Laws in the State restrict the transfer of land in favour of a person who is not an agriculturist of Himachal Pradesh.
- In the late 1980s and early 1990s, peasant movements were successful in raising the support prices for apple.

- However, in the 1990s, with rising fragmentation of land, low productivity and withdrawal of state support, agriculture became unsustainable.
- The cost of production of agricultural items increased substantially, denying remunerative prices to the poor and marginal growers.

Reasons for crisis

- There are two major reasons for the current crisis.
- The first is the increasing cost of production.
- The input cost of fertilizers, insecticides, and fungicides has risen in the last decade by 300%, as per some estimates.
- The cost of apple cartons and trays and packaging has also seen a dramatic rise.
- The second and immediate trigger for the agitation was the increase in the Goods and Services Tax on cartons from 12% to 18%.
- This was done to ensure that farmers are forced to sell their produce to big buyers instead of selling it in the open market.
- Large players do not buy apples in cartons; they procure them in plastic trays and decide the rate on the basis of kilogramme.

- By doing this, they argue that the cost of packaging gets reduced. It is true that it does in the open market, the price is decided on the basis of an apple carton.
- In this manner, the big players induce the apple farmers to sell the produce to them.
- But there is a catch. Unlike in the open market, where apples of all varieties/grades are procured, the large players only procure apples of high quality.
- What is required is an independent body that is duly supported and trusted by the farmers.
- Such a body should have representatives of apple growers, market players, commission agents and the government.
- This must be a statutory body that is also given the task of conducting research in the apple economy.
- The big growers have also started to shift from the conventional varieties to more genetically modified varieties called the spur, most of which are imported from European nations.

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India and Bangladesh

- Four specific issues seem to trouble the Bangladeshi side.
- First, the continued presence of 1.1 million Rohingyas who fled from Myanmar in 2017 has created enormous pressure on the economy and social harmony. Ms. Hasina has said India is a big country that should “accommodate” them.
- Further, she wants stronger support from India to facilitate their early return to Myanmar.
- Second, the absence of agreement on sharing of the Teesta waters, pending since 2011 due to West Bengal’s refusal to relent, and the broader issue of joint management of 54 common rivers, have been constant grievances.
- Third, India’s sensitivity to growing cooperation between Dhaka and Beijing rankles the authorities in Bangladesh.
- Ms. Hasina has stressed the point that if there were differences between India and China, she did not wish to “put her nose to it”.
- Four, she has conceded that despite her government’s secular policy, “incidents” against the Hindu minority have occurred, but her government has acted against miscreants.

Specific outcomes

- First, there was the agreement “to continue close security cooperation” over counter-terrorism, border crimes, and border management.
- Second, the two sides recommitted themselves to enhancing their development partnership which is already quite extensive and multi-faceted.
- Third, they agreed “to build resilient supply chains” between the two countries and “across the region”.
- A significant decision was to launch the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022 and to conclude negotiations by the time Bangladesh graduates from least developed country status in 2026.
- Finally, the leaders favoured expanding connectivity through more rail, road, inland waterways, and coastal shipping linkages.
- They agreed to build on the impressive successes achieved in the past decade in this sphere.
- Bilateral trade has touched a high watermark of \$18 billion.
- Logistics for power trade between Bangladesh and its neighbours India, Nepal, and Bhutan have been put in place.
- India will assist Bangladesh by sharing its rich experience of innovation through start-ups’
- The two governments agreed on the sharing of the waters of the Kushiyara, the common border river.
- They also agreed to exchange data on other rivers, set up their priorities and begin formulating the framework for “the interim water sharing arrangements”.

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