

Report reveals delayed wages are a key factor to mismatch between MGNREGS coverage, delivery

Sobhana K. Nair

NEW DELHI

A review of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for the financial year 2024-25 reveals that while the coverage has increased, with an 8.6% rise in number of registered households under the programme, the delivery of promised employment has gone down, with person days having dropped by 7.1%. This was revealed in a report released by LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists on Monday.

Person days under the MGNREGS is defined as the total number of workdays by a person registered under the scheme in a financial year.

The LibTech study revealed that only 7% of households got 100 days of work. The MGNREG Act promises guaranteed em-



Women at work: Women levelling the land, under the MGNREGS, in ASR district of Andhra Pradesh. V. RAJU

ployment up to 100 days. The report highlights that total registered households under the programme have gone up by 8.6% from 13.80 crore in FY 2023-24 to 14.98 crore in 2024-25.

At the same time, average days of employment per household fell by 4.3%, from 52.42 person days in FY 2023-24 it went down to 50.18 person days in FY

2024-25. This, the LibTech report states, reflects a mismatch between the scheme's coverage and its delivery. "This trend raises questions about systemic and implementation-level challenges that continue to constrain the programme's effectiveness," the report said.

Also, the persistent problem with the programme

of regional variations continues. Odisha (34.8%) Tamil Nadu (25.1%) and Rajasthan (15.9%) saw the sharpest decline in person days, while Maharashtra (39.7%), Himachal Pradesh (14.8%), and Bihar (13.3%) recorded increases.

Inadequate allocation

Among the key factors leading to an overall employment drop are the inadequate allocation of budget and extraordinary delay in wage payments reported from across the country. Both issues have been highlighted on various platforms. The parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development in the past has raised concerns over reduction in budget allocation by the Union government and its effect on the progress of the scheme. People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) had recommended

a budget allocation of ₹2.64 lakh crore for the MGNREGS for FY 2022-23 itself. However, the Union government has allocated only ₹86,000 crore for FY 2024-25. There was no revision in the MGNREGS budget for FY 2024-25.

The LibTech report also notes that the deletions of MGNREGS workers across the country have been arrested at least partially.

Between 2022 and 2024, 7.8 crore workers were deleted.

The Ministry maintained that both deletions and additions are part of a regular process. But the rate of deletions far exceeded the rate of additions. In the corresponding period, only 1.92 crore workers were added. For the first time in FY 2024-25, this trend has been reversed, the report notes. So, while 99 lakh workers were deleted, 2.22 crore were added.

Schools now reopen in Poonch, the district hit worst by Pak. shelling

All 1,391 schools with 95,000-odd students restart classes after 13 days; schools in border areas of Jammu, Samba, Kathua, Rajouri, and Udhampur also reopen, signalling a return to normalcy

Peerzada Ashiq

SRINAGAR

With 23 schools severely damaged and four children dead in mortar shelling by Pakistan, educational institutes reopened on Monday in Jammu and Kashmir's frontier district of Poonch - the worst-affected in the recent military confrontation with over 14 civilian deaths and injuries to dozens. Attendance was, however, expectedly on the lower side with fear still palpable among residents of the district.

All 1,391 schools with around 95,000 students, including high and higher secondary schools, reopened after a gap of 13 days in Poonch. "Attendance was on the lower side. Many families which migrated may not have returned to their homes yet. In remote areas, students would not be knowing about schools reopening. We recorded 10-16% attendance on the first day," Syed Iftikhar Hussain



Back to classes: Students attend the morning assembly at a school that reopened on Monday after two weeks in Poonch. PTI

Shah, Chief Education Officer of Poonch, told *The Hindu*.

At least 14 children were hit by Pakistani shelling and firing in Poonch after India carried out attacks inside Pakistan on May 7 in the wake of the Pahalgalam terror attack on April 22. Four children under the age of 15 died in the shelling, including a brother-sister duo, Ayan and Zoya. Maryam Khatoon, 7, from Poonch's Qazi Mohra area was one of the youngest to get killed. The students and staff at

Christ School, Poonch, observed a two-minute silence on Monday to mourn the tragic deaths of Ayan and Zoya.

WhatsApp groups

Many schools could not be fully functional because of the damages inflicted by the shelling. "Two schools were completely destroyed in the shelling in Poonch's Mankote tehsil," Mr. Shah said. To dissipate fear among students, principals and school heads appealed to students not to pay heed

to social media rumours. Several school WhatsApp groups have been activated to motivate students to re-join schools. "We have already started online classes for 11-12th grade," Mr. Shah added.

Many students of the high school in Khari Karma-ra, Poonch, made video appeals, urging their classmates to rejoin. However, many parents said they decided against sending their wards to school because they still feel insecure and saw the current ceasefire between the two countries as "fragile".

The administration decided to reopen classes a day after the Indian Army clarified that there was no expiry date to the ceasefire agreement. Besides Poonch, schools in border areas of Jammu, Samba, Kathua, Rajouri, and Udhampur also reopened, marking a significant step towards restoring normalcy in the region after days of tension along the Pakistan border, officials said.

Pak. had not resorted to nuclear signalling: Centre

U.S. was not involved in ceasefire talks and not informed about it, Misri tells parliamentary panel on External Affairs; all questions raised were answered 'satisfactorily', says Shashi Tharoor

Sobhana K. Nair

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

Pakistan did not resort to “nuclear signalling” in the wake of Operation Sindoor and the United States was “neither involved nor informed” about cessation of firing between the two countries, the Union government told the parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, headed by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, on Monday.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, who briefed the panel, rebutted Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's remarks on Pakistan being informed at the “start of our attack”, sources said. Mr. Misri told the panel



Key meet: Members of the parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Monday. PTI

that India's Director-General of Military Operations (DGMO) spoke to his Pakistani counterpart about Operation Sindoor only after the “first strike”. Mr. Misri detailed the recent spike in activities of Pakistani-sponsored terrorists operating on Indian soil. Pakistan continues to extend sup-

port for terrorists, helping them in training and by providing financial and technical support. In the past year, Mr. Misri reportedly told the panel, there were at least 24 terrorist-initiated attacks, leading to the deaths of 24 security personnel and more than 30 civilians.

Speaking to presspersons after the meeting, Mr. Tharoor said External Affairs Ministry officials and Mr. Misri “satisfactorily” answered all questions raised by the members. There was a “comprehensive and rich discussion”, he said.

Congress MP Deepender Hooda asked if India had lost any jets in the operation, which, as per sources, MEA officials said was beyond their domain to answer.

The Trinamool Congress's Lok Sabha member Abhishek Banerjee asked if the government had any information about the terrorists involved in the Pahalagam attack. There was no immediate reply.

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Pak. had not resorted to nuclear signalling: govt.

“Many of the MPs had thoughtful questions to ask. There was even a desire to have a resolution expressing solidarity with the Foreign Secretary in the face of the unwarranted attacks and comments, he himself requested that there should be no resolution but it was unanimous sentiment of the committee that he has performed good service for the nation, we all stand with him,” Mr. Tharoor said.

The investigations by security agencies, Mr. Misri said, had revealed that the Pakistan state apparatus has been aiding and abetting terror activities on Indian soil. Pakistan, through “coordinated ceasefire violations”, also helps terrorists cross the Line of Control (LoC) and also lends them assistance through drones, the government said.

Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP John Brittas asked for clarification on why U.S. President Donald Trump was the first to announce the “ceasefire” even before the two countries did, to which the government said that the U.S. was “neither involved nor informed”. Conversation with U.S. officials was part of a routine process, officials explained, equating it with India’s own interventions urging both Russia and Ukraine to de-escalate. It was only natural, the MEA officials said, for other countries to respond similarly. Mr. Misri clarified that India has clearly stated its position to world leaders that it is only responding to the Pahalgam attack. The MEA officials further said that India has responded through proper channels on Mr. Trump’s statements.

Mr. Misri reiterated the government’s stance that there was no deviation from the stated policy of no third-party mediation. Detailing the communication between the two sides, Mr. Misri said that after the “first strike” of Operation Sindoor, the Indian DGMO spoke to his Pakistani counterpart, to clarify that India was only hitting at the terror infrastructure and the Pakistani military can choose to stay out. He underlined that Mr. Gandhi’s comments in this context were misplaced. As per sources, Mr. Misri said the Pakistani Army did not intervene for eight hours. He said that on May 10, after India had hammered Pakistani bases, the Pakistani DGMO approached the Indian DGMO for cessation of firing and an understanding was reached between the two sides.

No advance notice from India on closure of land ports for our exports: Bangladesh official

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Bangladesh did not receive any official-level intimation before India shut down land ports for readymade garments, a diplomatic source from Bangladesh informed *The Hindu* on Monday.

The observations came two days after the Directorate General of Foreign Trade stopped readymade garment exports from Bangladesh to India through all Indian land ports, while also stopping land ports of northeastern India from being accessed by Bangladesh for export of specified products.

"We did not receive any advance notice that India was going to shut the land



In crisis: An official says there is growing public inconvenience in Bangladesh because of the Indian measures. AFP

ports for our products and as a result many traders on our side sent their trucks to the border land ports without knowing that they would not be allowed to proceed further. Now all those trucks are stuck on the border," said the source. Bangladesh views the closure of the Indian

land ports as a "sovereign action" that sometimes can be undertaken unilaterally, but as neighbours with shared history, a prior hint from India was expected by Dhaka, *The Hindu* was told.

While introducing the closure of land ports on the Indian side, officials

had said the step was being taken as a reciprocal measure to Bangladesh introducing a ban on Indian yarn exports through its land ports and for resorting to aggressive inspection of Indian trucks. However, it was learnt that the Bangladeshi measures taken on April 13 and the stopping of supply of Indian rice through Hili land port were to deal with corruption issues that the Bangladesh authorities were dealing with.

The official said there was growing public inconvenience because of the Indian measures. Bangladesh, it is understood, is also watching for any further punitive action, as the strong step from the Indian side appears to have

been initiated because of political reasons. It was also learned that Bangladesh feels that the barring of land ports will also stop people-to-people interaction that benefits from commercial engagement.

"With a lot of challenges, trade between India and Bangladesh had reached above \$10 billion and just as we are at the cusp of doing great things, we are again going down," said the source, explaining that the goods that Bangladesh supplies to India's northeast have a regional economic rational that benefits both sides. India has, however, said the message for Bangladesh from this decision was to tell that the northeast is not a "captive market" of Bangladesh.

U.K., EU announce a new phase in their relations at summit



(from left) Antonio Costa, Keir Starmer and Ursula von der Leyen with members of the Royal Navy in London on Monday. REUTERS

Sriram Lakshman

LONDON

The U.K. and the EU marked a new phase of their relationship after concluding agreements related to trade, defence and mobility, as leaders met in London for the first U.K.-EU formal summit since Brexit in 2016. The outcomes were described as a ‘win-win’ by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, while Labour’s political opponents criticised the deal as one-sided.

“It [the Summit] marks a new era in our relationship, and this deal is a win-win,” Mr. Starmer said, arguing that this was what the public voted for when they elected his Labour Party last year.

“We are turning a page. We are opening a new chapter in our unique relationship,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said at a joint press conference on Monday, with European Council President Antonio Costa and Mr. Starmer.

The deal announced on Monday would grant the EU access to U.K. fishing waters for 12 years instead of negotiating access on an annual basis. In return the

U.K. would have greater access to EU plant and animal markets – but need to keep itself aligned with changes to EU sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) regulations. The sides agreed to link the U.K. and EU’s carbon markets to avoid taxes on the steel and cement sectors for instance.

Mr Starmer’s political opponents had criticised the deal, accusing the government of backsliding and taking rules from Brussels. “This is a sellout, certainly on fishing,” Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch said. Former U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the deal was “hopelessly one-sided”.

The U.K. and the EU agreed to hold foreign and security policy dialogues every six months, coordinating approaches on space policy and sanctions. The deal would see initial steps taken for the U.K. to participate in the EU’s €150 billion loan facility for defence procurement

The sides agreed to further talks on a student exchange programme and a youth mobility scheme, which Mr. Starmer emphasised would be “capped” and have time limits.

As WHO warns of starvation, Israel vows to take over Gaza

PM Netanyahu to allow limited aid to enter the strip over 'practical and diplomatic reasons'; global health body says two million starving in the besieged Strip; over 50 killed in latest strikes by Israel

Agence France-Presse

GAZA CITY

Israel said on Monday it will "take control" of the whole of Gaza, where rescuers reported more than 50 killed in Israeli strikes as the military pressed a newly intensified campaign.

After more than two months of a total blockade, the World Health Organization issued a stark warning on the humanitarian crisis in the besieged Gaza Strip, saying "two million people are starving".

Under mounting pressure to lift the blockade it imposed on Gaza on March



Dire straits: Palestinians leave with their belongings following Israeli evacuation orders for Khan Younis on Monday. AFP

2, Israel has announced it would let limited aid into the besieged territory.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cited

"practical and diplomatic reasons" for the resumption, while the UN humanitarian agency OCHA said it had been approached by

Israeli authorities about the resumption of aid.

In southern Gaza, the Israeli military issued an evacuation call to Palestinians in and around Khan Younis city ahead of what it described as an "unprecedented attack".

Gaza's civil defence agency said 52 people had been killed in Israeli attacks on Monday across the territory.

Mr. Netanyahu, in a video posted on Telegram, said that "the fighting is intense and we are making progress."

"We will take control of all the territory of the strip" he added.