

# LABOUR/NREGA - 2012

(January to December 2012)

Compiled By  
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## **Mamata favours permanent settlement for hawkers (14)**

Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said she favours permanent settlement for 'recognised' hawkers. "I want a permanent settlement for recognised hawkers and I know some politicians don't want it for the sake of earning money from them," Banerjee said. Talking to a TV channel in the backdrop of fire in a city building, Banerjee said she was concerned about use of inflammable materials, like plastic sheets, by hawkers in congested areas which would have serious effect in case fire breaks out. A huge sum is allegedly extorted from hawkers by a section of civic authorities, police and the unions every year. This is why they are against issuing ID cards which would give hawkers a legitimate right to carry on with their trade, Hawker Sangram Committee officials said. Since 'Operation Sunshine' was launched to evict hawkers in 1997, the number of hawkers had grown in leaps and bounds and was now estimated over 1.2 lakh. There had been some initiative during the Left Front government for the distribution of identity cards but it never materialised. (Zee News 1/1/12)

## **Govt in dark on number of construction-related deaths (14)**

Though few people perhaps noticed it, the city's glitzy, hurried makeover claimed more victims towards the year's end. Nineteen-year-old construction labourer Saddam Ansari was building the roof on the eighth storey of a structure in Matunga on December 3 when he fell to his death. Barely a week before, a truck ferrying 30 construction workers had overturned in Ambarnath, killing Subhash Thakur and injuring 14 other workers. Ansari and Thakur's deaths, of course, are not aberrations. As new flyovers, skyscrapers and water tunnels come up in Mumbai and its neighbouring cities, transforming them for good, the ones paying the highest price are the 25 to 30 lakh construction workers driving the change. Labour officials state that, by their information, 40 such labourers died in the past six months in Maharashtra. The real figure, though, could be much higher, they admit. "The law requires that we be informed of deaths at construction sites within 72 hours. But we receive no official intimation," says a senior labour official. Construction work, to be sure, is a perilous occupation. The US Bureau of Labour Statistics noted that "construction accounted for more fatal work injuries than any other industry in 2010". In places like Mumbai, the reality is harsher. Workers can often be seen dangling from bamboo scaffoldings at building sites without safety harnesses or helmets. Equally worryingly, they remain deprived of basic welfare assured to them by law. The Centre enacted a law 15 years ago for the collection of a labour welfare cess, and it was notified by Maharashtra in 2007. Yet, not a single worker has tangibly benefited from this money so far. In the last five years, Maharashtra has collected Rs 325 crore—a pittance of a sum, according to labour experts, who argue that the frenzied construction in Mumbai alone should have generated higher revenues. A welfare board to oversee disbursement of funds and ensure workers' welfare was formed last May; it is currently registering workers. Predictably, workers are clueless about the benefits owed to them. The welfare vacuum pinches only during crises. Realisation struck construction worker Janardhan Tuksunder when he sustained head injuries after a live cable fell on him at a Koparkhairane site five months ago. He was forced out of work for nearly a week and left with a medical bill of Rs 450. "I have no constant employer. I take up work wherever I get it. Who would foot my bill? They would ask me to leave, instead," Tuksunder says matter-of-factly. Some construction groups have initiated group insurance schemes for their workers, but such initiatives are mostly dependent on the largesse of the developers. Despite repeated attempts, the Maharashtra Chamber of Housing Industry did not comment on labour welfare. Commissioner of labour Sanjay Deshmukh refused to go into the details of construction-related fatalities or the lack of safety cover for workers. "We are in the process of implementing welfare schemes," is all he was willing to say. Labour officials say they are now contacting

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police stations to record the number of construction labour deaths. (Times of India 2/1/12)

#### **MNREGS fails to guarantee jobs in MP (14)**

BHOPAL: Jobless and poor in the rural pockets of Madhya Pradesh are unable to get guaranteed benefit of 100 man days of work under the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) programme due to lack of awareness and inability to demand work among the masses. A survey conducted by the MP State Planning Board suggests that barely 1% of the applicants are able to get 100 man days of work. The survey undertaken by the state planning board jointly with the Poverty Monitoring and Policy Support Unit indicates that 56.1 per cent of households which migrate have got more than 30 days of work, as compared with landless and BPL households which do not migrate. This, despite the fact that MGNREGS primarily aims to curb migration. The rural employment guarantee programme guarantees 100 man days of employment in a year to a poor family. The state government has spent around Rs 95672.88 crore over on the scheme in the last 4-5 years. The state planning commission study covered a large sample of households about 12000 across 16 districts. The estimates show that of more than 25 lakh household who have got work under MGNREGS, only 18684 households have actually got 100 days of work, as guaranteed. Majority of the applicants (48 per cent) are able to secure jobs for 10 to 30 days. 7.1 lakh households (27 per cent) could get 30 to 60 days of work, while 2.2 lakh (8 per cent) could secure only for less than 10 days of work. The reports states, "Since the practice of applying or demanding work is not there, people are only getting work as and when the works are implemented by the panchayats. Because of the lack of awareness, people do not demand work. As a result the aspect of guarantee for work against demand is practically missing in the scheme." The report says that only 28 per cent have demanded work. "Of those who have demanded work, 8.65 lakh households (48.8 per cent) have got work within 15 days. The aspect of job guarantee is still missing in the scheme," according to the report. Against a guaranteed 100 days of work, the average households are getting only 31.8 days of work in a year, in Madhya Pradesh. (Times of India 4/1/12)

#### **Contract workers' pay likely to be future rub in labour relations (14)**

New Delhi: Parity between contract and regular workers, and having skilled floor managers to address labour troubles were the key lessons companies internalised during 2011 — moving away from a year that saw at least a dozen major strikes affecting work across sectors. Year 2011 saw the emergence of disproportionate pay to contract workers as a major reason for dissatisfaction among workers. Three strikes at Maruti Suzuki India Limited's Manesar plant were emblematic of this rising trend. The year began with an eight-day strike at Mahindra and Mahindra's Nashik plant over the demand of "equal pay for equal work". The year ended with a three-month strike at Dr Reddy's Laboratories' API manufacturing facility near Visakhapatnam over disagreement over pay to contract workers. Industry agrees that the issue of contract workers was brewing and ignored for long, and needs immediate attention. According to estimates, around 94 per cent of the workers in the country were employed in the unorganised sector, while the rest six per cent form part of the organised sector. Most labour laws are enforceable in the organised sector; keeping a huge work force out of bounds of any labour rights. Most companies have different pay and incentives for contract and regular workers, with tabled being tilted against the contract workforce. Amitava Ghosh, senior vice-president and head regulatory at TeamLease Services, an HR services company, notes that upsurge in strikes sends a message to the government that regularisation of contract labour should be stressed and laws to be amended accordingly. "Else the crisis, like the present ones, will recur," he notes. Adds Sundeep Arora, vice-president, legal and compliance, Gi Staffing Services Private Limited: "If workers are deprived of basic rights, a hygienic and improved working conditions and equal pay for equal work on a par with permanent employees of an organisation, sooner or later unfavourable situations may occur." Companies also say strong floor managers, skilled to handle labour trouble, are missing. "Most companies don't have good employee relations managers," shrugs E Balaji, MD and CEO, Ma Foi, an international HR service provider. "Because of it, they aren't able to gauge and address labour issues. Companies need to hire more such managers to address labour trouble." Points out TeamLease's Ghosh: "Strike is always a manifestation of unrepresented causes of workers but judicious study and foresight of employer to predict the workers' demand and gradual preparation and planning can mitigate the strike at any point of time." From 2011, "the lesson learnt is that workers participation in decision-making and transparency in input and output of the establishment can bring back peace in the industry". However, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry disagrees that the year 2011 was any different from any other. B P Pant, the chamber's director

(labour employment) agrees on the need to balance the pays of contract workers versus the regular workers, but argues that de-politicisation of trade unions is the need of the hour. "The issue of contract workers needs to be tackled," he says. "But, the biggest threat is the affiliation of trade unions to political parties." For the trade unions, the previous year was also one of soul-searching, as major strikes, such as the ones in Maruti, Mahindra and Mahindra and Bosch, were led by leaders who had no political affiliation with any trade unions or political party. This changing trend forced trade unions to come together for the first time, keeping aside their political rivalries. As part of this, on November 8, all 12 central trade unions came together to lead a national protest against rising prices and unemployment. To further this, another national joint-strike has been planned by the trade unions on February 28. "There are few challenges for us going in 2012," says Saji Narayanan, National President, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, country's largest trade union by membership. "During 2011, for the first time the trade unions raised issue of price rise. This is a new territory for us. Second, we want to increase our presence in the unorganised sector which has the maximum labour population." J John, editor, Labour File, a bi-monthly magazine on labour issues, says the road ahead will be challenging for the trade unions. "The trade unions have to reconcile with the new realities," he notes. "This year saw many strikes happen without much assistance from them. Trade unions have to understand why this is happening more often." (Business Standard 6/1/12)

#### **Job scheme wages through Aadhaar launched in Jharkhand (14)**

RANCHI, January 7, 2012: To overcome the delay in payment of wages to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) workers in Jharkhand, allegedly owing to administrative apathy, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has piloted a project in Jharkhand. Under the project, online authentication and Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS) in respect of MGNREGS was conducted in three blocks of three districts. For the first time in India, the Ratu block of Ranchi district has implemented cash payments for the MGNREGS workers by a biometric scan based on the UID. The banks have upgraded software and system to enable the payment. At a press conference in Ratu on Friday, Ram Sevak Sharma, director-general, UIDAI, said: "A micro ATM device will be installed in every village so that the beneficiary can save time and money as we came to know through our research that travelling to any bank costs the beneficiary a day's wage. The AEPS will help to get payment on the same day when money is credited by the government." "As the micro ATM will be connected online, the beneficiary may access his/her funds from any micro ATM from any village. This process will prevent rent-seeking and corruption, by giving the choice to the beneficiary," he added. (The Hindu 7/1/12)

#### **Bengal to increase job days to 50 under MGNREGA (14)**

Kolkata: West Bengal will increase to 50 the job days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) from 19 till date in this fiscal and hold talks with banks to ensure wages at the end of each working day."Under MGNREGA, the average minimum days of work was 19 days in our state," state Panchayat and Rural Development Minister Subrata Mukherjee told reporters here Tuesday. "We target that the number of days be increased to 50 within the current financial year," he added. Currently it takes three to four weeks for the money given by the central government to reach people working under the project, he said. "The government will hold talks with the banks and different agencies so that daily wage earners get their money by cash or cheque at the end of every working day," the minister said. (Zee News 11/1/12)

#### **Now, workers in unorganised sector under health insurance scheme (14)**

New Delhi, Jan 12 : The union cabinet Thursday brought workers in the unorganised sector under the cover of Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana through which they are entitled to smart card-based cashless health insurance cover of Rs.30,000 per family every year. The cabinet extended the benefits of the scheme to building and other construction workers, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) beneficiaries, street vendors, beedi workers and domestic workers, an official release said. The beneficiary family will have to pay Rs.30 per annum per family as registration/renewal fee while the administrative cost is borne by the state government. Under the scheme, the central government contributes 75 percent of the annual premium while the state governments contribute 25 percent. In the northeast region and Jammu and Kashmir, the premium is shared in the ratio of 90:10. The decision was taken after the cabinet reviewed the implementation of the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, launched Oct, 1, 2007, as the health insurance scheme for families

living below the poverty line. It was operationalised in April 2008. (IANS) (New Kerala 12/1/12)

#### **Workers not paid under job scheme in Joida (14)**

KARWAR, January 13, 2012: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA) appears to have lost its direction in Joida taluk in Uttara Kannada district. Many workers who had worked under the scheme are yet to get wages. Many are planning to move to different parts of the State and to Goa in search of job. In Kumbarawada Gram Panchayat in Joida taluk, the (MGNREGA) scheme had failed because the gram panchayat was running short of Rs. 5 lakh to pay the wages. Gram panchayat president Prajwini Naik said she had written to the zilla panchayat Chief Executive Officer about the failure on the part of the officials to implement the Management Information System (MIS) which had led to this problem. But the zilla panchayat officials refuted these allegations and said the zilla panchayat was ready to sanction funds. About Rs. 59 lakh grant was still with many gram panchayats in Joida taluk. The present problem had cropped up because the Panchayat Development Officers in many gram panchayats had not prepared the MIS for the employment guarantee schemes, a senior zilla panchayat official said. Another zilla panchayat official said 15 gram panchayats in Joida taluk, except Akheti, were facing a similar problem. If the scheme failed because of the negligence of the officials, then the officials concerned would be held responsible for it, he said. Many elected representatives in Joida taluk have demanded proper use of funds and the Government should guarantee employment to people to stop migration. (The Hindu 13/1/12)

#### **Church-sponsored labour union gaining momentum (14)**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, January 13, 2012: Kerala Labour Movement, an apolitical trade union formed at the behest of the Kerala Catholic Bishops Council (KCBC), is gradually but steadily emerging as a reckonable force among labourers in different sectors, mainly the unorganised sector. The movement seeks to strive for the betterment of labourers who have still not become part of any trade union movement and also for good governance at grass-roots level. Its president Joy Gothuruth told The Hindu that the movement, though formed under the aegis of the KCBC, has a secular nature and functions beyond caste, religion, and other considerations. It has a notable presence among workers in the domestic, construction, and plantation sectors, besides tailors, fisherfolk, and employees of shops and commercial establishments. The growing membership base in different sectors is being cited as a pointer to its growth profile. Of 27,000-odd members in the construction sector, the movement has already secured a membership for 8,000 labourers in the Kerala Construction and Other Workers Welfare Fund Board. Similarly, 80 per cent of 10,000 tailors who have joined the movement have been included in the respective welfare fund board. The union claims to have won a membership of 14,000 domestic workers as well. The council had made a major intervention in the last local body elections and called upon its members to field presentable candidates at maximum places so that it would be able to achieve the goal of good governance in local bodies, which now have a pivotal role in handling Plan funds and catalysing the development process at grass-root level. The labour movement has given due importance for pursuing the decisions of the council and takes keen interest in improving its presence in grama sabhas and in the development programmes of local bodies. As many as 10,000 self-help groups attached to 30 dioceses are complementing the efforts of the movement for improving the lot of the marginalised sections and women. According to Mr. Joy, right to information is another major thrust area of the movement. Members as well as group leaders are using the potential of the law to elicit information from all available sources. The focus given in organising labourers who have been neglected by trade unions is being cited as the reason for the prominence of the movement. (The Hindu 13/1/12)

#### **Gardens seek shield from job scheme (14)**

Jalpaiguri, Jan. 15: The Tea Association of India has appealed to the state government to exclude garden workers from the rural job scheme during the plucking season. The association that has 42 estates under its wing has said a good number of workers prefer to avail themselves of the scheme and it has an adverse impact on the production of tea. The appeal was made by Hemant Bangur, the all-India president of the association, at the 41st annual general meeting of the body in Jalpaiguri's Nagrakata yesterday. R.K. Rungta, the chairperson of the association's north Bengal chapter, also demanded that work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should not be implemented in gardens from April to November, considered to be the "peak season". "We are finding that about 30 to 35 per cent of workers stay away from either plucking or factories because of the National Rural Employment Guarantee

Scheme, affecting the production of tea. If the scheme is still implemented, then the planters will have no other option but to start the mechanisation of the plucking process," said Rungta. Trade unions have termed the demand unjust. "The daily wage of a worker is Rs 130 under the NREGS whereas he is paid only Rs 85 in gardens. An estate labourer would be paid Rs 2,210 if he works for 26 days a month. But an individual gets Rs 1,950 if he works under the NREGS for 15 days," said Chitta Dey, the convener of the Co-ordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers. Dey said the only way out for the estate owners was to make the daily wage in gardens on a par with the pay under the NREGS. "We have been demanding that the planters be given a daily wage that is higher than what is offered under the NREGS, say Rs 165, to solve the problem," said Dey. He said there were nearly 6.5 lakh workers in the 154 tea gardens in the Dooars. The officer for the NREGS in the Jalpaiguri district, Samaresh Mondal, said providing work under the scheme to job card holders was mandatory. "Anyone with a job card will be provided with work under the central scheme. We cannot deny jobs to anyone under the law." North Bengal development minister Gautam Deb will visit the closed Dheklapara tea estate tomorrow to see for himself the problems faced by workers there. He will be accompanied by minister of state for labour Sabina Yasmin. "The labour minister and I will visit the garden tomorrow along with the labour secretary and take necessary steps for the relief of the workers," said Deb. The workers in the garden at Madarihat have been reportedly suffering from malnutrition. The estate was shut down in 2005. (Telegraph 16/1/12)

#### **Vendors with semi-perishable goods may lose livelihood: Survey (14)**

Jaipur, Jan 20 : Street vendors selling semi-perishable goods in Rajasthan are facing a never-before threat of loss of livelihood, a survey of over 2,500 vendors has revealed. The Public Response Against Helplessness and Action for Redressal (PRAHAR), an NGO working for the welfare of street vendors nationally, and Centre for Human Rights and Social Welfare (CHRSW), Rajasthan, an NGO from Rajasthan, Thursday released the study 'Cause, Effect and Redressal: Loss of Livelihood to Street Vendors of Rajasthan'. Out of a total of 2.5 million street vendors in the state, 54 percent sell semi-perishable goods. The study said they have been facing increasing threat to their livelihoods due to introduction of "impractical and discriminatory rules". The study noted that 83 percent vendors selling all categories of goods said they were facing increased harassment by local authorities and goons, and pay an average of Rs.140 per week as 'hafta'. At least 60 percent vendors said police and municipal authorities were the main source of harassment while 42 percent vendors selling all categories of goods said they face inhuman treatment from authorities and always live in a threat of their goods being confiscated, eviction and loss of livelihood. Moreover, 36 percent vendors across all categories said that due to lack of legal identity, they are unable to source financial assistance. "It is sad to note that despite being an integral part of our society, street vendors continue to be subjected to harassment by authorities due to ambiguous and discriminatory rules and non-implementation of a clearly defined welfare policy," said PRAHAR executive committee member and national coordinator Abhay Raj. CHRSW general secretary Saroj Khan said the study clearly shows that the exploitation and eviction of street vendors is very much evident and is only increasing. "According to the vendors, discriminatory and impractical rules, certain municipality acts, beautification and developmental drives causing forced eviction are resulting in loss of livelihood to masses and becoming pretext for extortion of money and corruption," Khan said. She said a uniform central law must be enacted and all anti-vendor activities or rules must be abolished or amended so that the spirit of National Urban Street Vendors policy could be upheld and vendors can enjoy their right to earn their livelihood. (IANS) (New Kerala 20/1/12)

#### **Aruna minimum wage plea to PM (14)**

New Delhi, Jan. 21: A member of the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council has urged Manmohan Singh not to appeal a Karnataka High Court order that directed the state government to pay statutory minimum wages to workers under the rural job act. In a letter to the Prime Minister, activist Aruna Roy said the Centre's decision to challenge the order reflected its "insensitivity" towards the rights of the poor. The high court order had come in response to a petition that said the rate paid under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was much lower than what had been prescribed under the Minimum Wages Act. States have the freedom to fix minimum wages. In Karnataka, it is Rs 135 a day, much higher than the Rs 100 per day paid under the job act. If the court order is implemented, the government will have to pay an additional Rs 4,000 crore as arrears and pick up an added tab of Rs 1,000 crore every year. In the letter sent today, Aruna, a principal mover behind the MGNREGA during UPA I, said: "I am deeply distressed, dismayed and shocked that the rural

development ministry (representing the central government) has been instructed to file an appeal against the high court judgment.... This decision reflects the gross insensitivity of the central government towards the rights of the country's poor." Aruna described the job act as a law that "guarantees those at the bottom of the economic pyramid their basic entitlements" and said the payment of minimum wages under the act had "created a synergy" between the MGNREGA and the wage act. Delinking the two, she added, would render them both "weak and ineffective". Aruna argued that when the Centre, as an employer, asserts that it is not obliged to pay minimum wages, it "loses its moral authority to enforce the Minimum Wages Act". It also, she added, sends a "message to all exploitative industry... that minimum wages can be violated with impunity". Aruna said she was aware of the government's concern that it might have to underwrite the increased costs if a state government "arbitrarily" hiked the minimum wage, but added: "The evidence of the last six years shows that this has not really happened." In January 2009, the Centre had, through an executive order, frozen wages under the job act at Rs 100 per day. With time, the rate fell below the statutory minimum wages paid in many states. Aruna signed off her missive today with a warning. "Claims of aspiring for 'inclusive growth' by a government that fights the payment of minimum wages will only ring hollow and false," she said. (The Telegraph 22/1/12)

#### **Paying minimum wages in rural job scheme: Apex court (14)**

New Delhi, Jan 23 : The Supreme Court Monday reminded the central government that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was a socially beneficial legislation and the government could not be seen as being reluctant in releasing funds for the scheme. "It's (MGNREGA) a piece of beneficial legislation. You should give it yourself instead of being seen as reluctant to give it," said a bench of Justice Cyriac Joesph and Justice Gyan Sudha Misra. Issuing notice on a petition by the central government challenging the Sep 27, 2011, order of the Karnataka High Court directing payment of Rs.145 as minimum wage to people employed under MGNREGA, the apex court said that the government should give minimum wages rather than citing budgetary constraints. While asking the central government to bear the additional burden of Rs. 20 per worker per day for paying them the minimum wage of Rs.145, the court stayed the operation of the high court judgment on the payment of arrears from Jan 1, 2009 till Sep 27, 2009. However, the apex court refused to stay the operation of the judgment for now. At present, Rs. 125 is being paid to those working under the MGNREGA. Holding that the wage structure was decided based on the consumer price index, Solicitor General Rohinton Nariman told the court that the financial implication of the high court judgment was about Rs.7,500 crore and would have implications in other states. Even as Nariman focused on the financial implications and budgetary constraints, the court said that entire matter should not be treated in an adversarial manner, and asked the solicitor general to resolve the issue in an accommodating manner. The court gave the respondent, Karnataka Prantya Raita Sangh and others, two weeks time to file reply to the central government's petition and a week's time to the government to file its rejoinder and directed the listing of the matter for detailed arguments after three weeks. Appearing for the Karnataka Prantya Raita Sangh, senior counsel Anil Divan pointed out it was settled position for the last 27 years that non-payment of minimum wages was tantamount to forced labour. He cited three apex court judgments in support of his contention. (IANS) (New Kerala 23/1/12)

#### **SC prods Centre on rural wages (14)**

New Delhi, Jan. 23: The Supreme Court today nudged the Centre to withdraw its appeal against a high court order that directs it to observe Karnataka's minimum wage law in its rural job scheme payments in that state. The Centre had challenged the Karnataka High Court directive in the top court citing budget constraints, but a two-judge bench refused a wholesale stay on the order, which means the government must for now pay the minimum wage in Karnataka under the scheme. But the bench went further and handed the Centre a piece of advice. "It (the rural job scheme) is a piece of beneficial legislation. You should give it (the minimum wage) yourself instead of being seen as reluctant to give it," Justice Gyansudha Misra, sitting alongside Justice Cyriac Joseph, observed. It's the states' prerogative to fix the minimum wage within their territories. The minimum wage in Karnataka is Rs 145 a day but the Centre pays Rs 125 in the state under the job scheme. (The job scheme wages are linked to the consumer price index, and so are different in different states.) The bench has issued notices to all the parties to present their views. In the interim, it has stayed one part of the high court's September 2011 order that asked the Centre to pay the wage arrears from January 1, 2009. The Centre today told the top court that if it pays the minimum wage in Karnataka, it would have to do so in all the other states whose minimum wages are

higher than the wage paid under the job scheme. Solicitor-general Rohinton Nariman argued: "The implications of the judgment is around Rs 7,500 crore on our budgetary allocation. The judgment is vis-à-vis Karnataka, but if its ratio is upheld, there will be a domino effect on other states." Nariman said the job scheme wages were higher than the minimum wages in at least 14 states, including Gujarat. "In principle, we are opposed to this judgment," he said, citing how Article 41 of the Constitution mandates the government to provide work to people within the limits of its economic capacity. He said that under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the minimum wage cannot be less than Rs 60. "The Centre ensures that there is no exploitation, but the state cannot unilaterally keep hiking the minimum wages time and again," he said. Nariman argued that the high court had been wrong in holding that the Karnataka Minimum Wages Act should prevail over the employment guarantee act. Senior counsel Anil Diwan, appearing for a group of labourers, argued that the Centre's failure to pay the minimum wages would amount to exploitation of its own citizens, banned under Article 23 of the Constitution. He cited how a Union minister and a member of the Sonia Gandhi-headed National Advisory Committee had asked the government to pay the minimum wages rather than challenge the high court judgment. (The Telegraph 24/1/12)

### **Poor labourers pledged Rs 100, get Re 1 for day's work under employment guarantee scheme (14)**

NEW DELHI: Poor workers are being paid wages as low as Rs 1-10 for a hard day's labour in states like Rajasthan and Karnataka under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme which promises a real wage of Rs 100 per day. Documents with TOI show that many desperate, poor labourers across the country are being cheated of their hard earned money and the much publicized guaranteed daily wage of Rs 100 on many occasions remains a mere illusion. The scheme legally entitles any citizen in the hinterland to demand work for 100 days from the government and be paid Rs 100 per day for the work rendered. But documents with TOI show how rules of the scheme have allowed government officials to cheat the people of their day's entitlement. In practice, the promise of guaranteed wage has been supplanted by non-transparent efficiency norms which allow the executing authorities to use discretion to hammer down the wages. De-linking the payment under the scheme from minimum wages keeps the wages low to begin with. On top of it, linking it to non-transparent efficiency norms has ensured that the poor can be robbed of their wages under MNREGA, and that it can be done safely under the techno-legal loopholes passing off the inefficiency of the bureaucracy to the poor at the latter's cost. Initial reports had suggested just a one-off case of Re 1 being paid to several in Tonk district in Rajasthan. But trawling through hundreds of muster rolls in the state has shown that this is an endemic fraud being perpetrated on the poor in Rajasthan. A survey of 249 panchayats in 33 districts of the state carried out by Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan has shown that in 37 panchayats, some people were paid wages between Rs 1-10 in 2011-12. Another 40 panchayats paid between Rs 11-20 to people employed to carry out rural development work under the scheme. In only 7 of the 249 panchayats, scrutinized workers ever got between Rs 91-100 per day for their work in 2011-12. The story is as bad in Karnataka. A scrutiny of the muster rolls shows that in Bapur village of Sadapur panchayat in Raichur, people got paid anywhere from Rs 2-11 for carrying out work under the scheme. It is not a one-off case in Karnataka either. The meagre wages have been paid in several districts over the last year, documents with TOI show. The shocking discrepancy between the promise and the reality is a pointer to how the details of a scheme can end up defeating the objective it was meant for. In this case, while Rs 100 is publicized as the guaranteed pay, it is actually the maximum the poor can get and it entirely depends on the district administration if the worker will get it at all. Under the scheme, the administration first assesses how much work was done in the day by the labourer on a particular project. This technical assessment takes place days after the labourer has completed his work. The labourer has no room to dispute the assessment and is, thus forced, to settle for whatever has already been put in the banks. More so, because in many cases, the payments reach months after completion of the project. Consequently, in several districts of Karnataka and Rajasthan, vigilant activists have found the poor being defrauded of their rightful income. Perhaps the only reasons cases have not been found in other states is that no one has scrutinized thousands of muster rolls generated so far. This is in sharp contrast to the fact that UPA government is now fighting a case in the Supreme Court to ensure that it does not have to pay minimum wages fixed by states, which in many cases, Karnataka included, are higher than that prescribed by the Centre for the scheme. It also contrasts with the high pitched arguments about MNREGA stealing away labour from the farms by paying a guaranteed wage of Rs 100 per day. UPA fears paying prescribed minimum wages will be a drain on its coffers. (Times of India 27/1/12)

### **Bengal will cancel trade union rights of state staff (14)**

Kolkata: The West Bengal government announced Tuesday that it had decided to withdraw the trade union rights of its employees. The announcement, made at the secretariat by the labour minister, triggered outrage among state government staff. Minister Purnendu Bose said the government would withdraw a clause in the service rules, introduced by the LF government in 1981, giving full trade union rights to state government staff. Withdrawal of the amendment will cancel the right of employees to go on strike. The decision will be put before the cabinet at its next meeting, the minister said. Labour department sources said the government's move is aimed at disciplining employees and reducing the influence of political parties on state staff. Activities of employees' associations are likely to be restricted. Bose said the 1981 amendment contradicts the Trade Union Act of 1926. The Act gives full rights to workers to form unions affiliated to political parties, but state service rules do not allow state employees to be members of any political outfit, he said. Bose stressed, however, that employees' associations would not be derecognised. Samir Ranjan Mojumdar, general secretary of Nabaparjay, a state government employees' association, said, "We will protest with all our might. Trade unions will take up the matter with the prime minister and finance minister on February 28. We will also demonstrate at Jantar Mantar in Delhi." Leaders of the CPI-M controlled Coordination Committee said they would resist attempts to curb the rights of employees. The Mamata Banerjee government had recently withdrawn recognition for police associations, arguing that a police welfare board would be set up to look after the welfare of policemen. (Indian Express 1/2/12)

### **Street vendors mingle with academics, narrate woes (14)**

PATNA: Students and faculty members of the PG diploma course in Women's Studies of Patna University on Tuesday had an interaction with some street vendors of the city for knowing their problems. The interaction programme was facilitated by the state branch of the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) at Darbhanga House. Six woman vendors, mostly vegetable sellers, shared the dais with the social scientists and narrated their woes in earning their livelihood due to the highhandedness of "middle men" and the police. They complained of being subjected to financial exploitation by these people and pleaded for creating vendors' zone at suitable places in the city so that they could carry on their trade to make both ends meet. PU economics teacher Nawal Kishore Chaudhary, history teacher Maya Shankar, NASVI project manager Sonal Sinha and coordinator Pravin Mishra expressed their concern over the continued neglect of the marginal sections of society and urged the government to take necessary steps for ameliorating their sufferings. PU history teacher and course coordinator Padmalata Thakur coordinated the programme and appealed to vendors to educate their girls. The UGC-sponsored refresher course in earth science organized by PU geography department concluded here on Tuesday with a call for creating awareness among the people about various types of hazards and disasters. State Disaster Management Authority vice-chairman Anil Kumar Sinha, in his valedictory address, spelt out the difference between hazards and disasters and opined that "disaster management" should be better called "disaster risk reduction". He said that the authority is striving hard to make the common man aware of disasters and subsequent plans of preparedness with a view to minimizing damages. An "earthquake week" was observed recently and "flood week" would be celebrated in the first week of June to educate the people, he said. PU registrar Vibhas Kumar Yadav, in his presidential remarks, pleaded for construction of new buildings as per earthquake-resistant designs to minimize damages in different areas of Bihar which are quite vulnerable to earthquakes. PU geography department head Ras Bihari Prasad Singh welcomed the guests. Altogether 31 teachers from different universities of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh participated in the refresher course. (Times of India 1/2/12)

### **Looting of MGNREGS funds amounts to crime against the poor, says Sonia (14)**

NEW DELHI, February 3, 2012: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday brought up the alleged embezzlement of funds meant for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme — an issue that has put the Mayawati government in the dock — at a function commemorating the completion of six years of the job entitlement scheme. Holding the State governments responsible for the shortcomings, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh directed them to ensure timely payment of wages to the MGNREGS workers. Without naming the Bahujan Samaj Party government in U.P., against which the Congress-led UPA government has been pressing for a CBI enquiry, Ms. Gandhi said loot of MGNREGS

money amounted to a crime against the poor. She said the plunder was tantamount to doing injustice to the Father of the Nation, as the scheme was named after him. Her warning that such irregularities should not be ignored was a clear message for the government to pursue the enquiry process. She also hailed the social audit process as an effective instrument to expose irregularities. Ms. Gandhi expressed happiness that the CAG had also been roped in to enquire into utilisation of the rural job scheme funds, to pinpoint the irregularities, and place accountability. She said, apart from the social audits, reports of State Quality Monitors showed how the funds had been 'embezzled' in U.P., following which Union Minister of Rural Development Jairam Ramesh wrote to Ms. Mayawati demanding a CBI enquiry, which she declined. When a PIL was filed before the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, the Centre in its response affidavit supported the demand for a CBI enquiry. Ms. Gandhi also pulled up the economically backward States for their 'failure' to implement the scheme. She also deprecated the delay in the payment of wages. Calling the delay in payment of wages as a cause for concern, Dr. Singh said owing to inadequate staff, it was not possible to carry out the verification process and hand out wages within the stipulated 15-day period. He asked the States to take up the issue on a priority basis. Pointing to the provision of payment of unemployment allowance to those not provided work within 15 days of placement of demand for a job, the Prime Minister expected the States to abide by the rule. Hailing the project, Dr. Singh said its convergence with the Integrated Action Plan in Naxalite-affected districts had raised the aspirations of the people. Dr. Singh called for its proper implementation to speed up the development process, which would eliminate the causes that forced people to resort to the path of violence. (The Hindu 3/2/12)

#### **Khadi weavers may be covered under MNREGA: Virbhadra (14)**

Jaipur, Feb 4 : The Centre will consider to cover khadi weavers (bunkars) under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). This was assured by Union Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Industries Virbhadra Singh at a state level convention of khadi weavers and spinners here today. He said that there was vast scope for making khadi products more viable and profitable. Mr Singh said, "khadi products can be made popularise by giving them modern look and form." The convention, organised by Rajasthan State Khadi Gramodhyog Board, was presided over by Khadi and Village Industry Commission (KVIC) Chairman Devendrakumar R Desai. Rajasthan Khadi and Village Industries Minister Babu Lal Nagar and State Board Chairman Anil Pareek were also present on the occasion. (UNI) (New Kerala 4/2/12)

#### **HC orders rehab for over 1500 bonded labourers (14)**

BHUBANESWAR: The fight to abolish the obnoxious practice of "bonded labour" in Odisha has received a boost. The Orissa high court recently directed the collectors of Puri, Khurda, Cuttack and Jagatsinghpur districts to identify, release and rehabilitate 1,585 lower caste people forced to render services to their upper caste counterparts. The court has set a three-month deadline for the collectors. The January 18 order followed a petition by human rights activist Baghambar Pattnaik in April 2011. The petitioner had alleged that the administration of the four districts had neglected to implement a 2008 National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) order to abolish the bonded labour system. Pattnaik said the "landmark judgment" would herald a much-needed social change in Odisha and other states vulnerable to the caste-based practice. "I have sent copies of the judgment to the district collectors. Let us hope that they would now swing into action and start the rehabilitation process soon," said Pattnaik, who has been waging a decade-long battle for ending the practice a decade ago. The state has around five lakh bonded labourers, he added. "We have addressed the issue of bonded labour several times in the past. We would abide by the high court order and soon start the identification process of the bonded labourers," a Puri district official said. In December 2011, the Puri district administration had distributed "release certificates" to 17 men from the barber caste in Bramhagiri area following an NHRC directive. The 17 men were bound by the local practice of Bartan. It mandated the men to wash the feet of guests during social functions in villages in lieu of about 15 kg of paddy per annum. As per the law, each person was given Rs 1,000, along with the certificate and Rs 19,000 later by the government for their rehabilitation. However, Pattnaik alleged that some of those "released" men were still being treated as bonded labourers by upper caste villagers. Pattanaik added: "As many as 2,88,098 debt-bonded labourers in the country were identified, released and rehabilitated by March 31, 2009. The highest was in Tamilnadu (65,573), followed by Karnataka (63,437 identified, 57,185 rehabilitated) and Odisha (50,029 identified, 46,901 rehabilitated)." (Times of India 7/2/12)

### **Supreme Court fiat to all States on disbursement of welfare cess (14)**

NEW DELHI, February 9, 2012: The Supreme Court has directed the States of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Sikkim and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu and Lakshadweep to implement the various schemes formulated for the welfare of the workers without any further delay. A Bench of Chief Justice S.H. Kapadia and Justices A.K. Patnaik and Swatanter Kumar gave this direction on Tuesday on a batch of contempt petitions filed by the National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labour alleging that all the States had failed to implement the provisions of the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulations of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 and the Building and other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996. The Bench divided the States into three categories. States of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Tamil Nadu which had constituted Welfare Boards and collected some cess, had, however, not collected the required quantum of cess and had also not distributed the amount to the registered applicants. The Bench said: "Before we take any action against the officers responsible for enforcing the schemes and proper collection and disbursement of cess, we would grant a last and final opportunity to these States to file affidavits of compliance within four weeks subject to payment of Rs.10,000 each, as costs. The cost shall be payable to the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee." The Bench said under Category-II would come Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Sikkim and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territories of Andaman and Nicobar, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu and Lakshadweep where the cess amounts had not been distributed to the applicants for the reason that the competent authority in the State government had not approved the welfare schemes or the welfare fund had not been constituted. The Bench directed these States to ensure that the fund was created and the schemes "are formulated and notified in accordance with the provisions of the Act and the Cess Act within four weeks. The welfare schemes framed by the respective States/Union Territories shall be given due publicity and be brought to the notice of the concerned workmen and eligible applicants by the district authority/sub-committee responsible." The Bench said the States of Kerala, Punjab, Nagaland and Himachal Pradesh and the Union Territory of Lakshadweep would come in the third category "where the States/Union Territory which have not given any details of the schemes framed, reasons for its non-implementation and consequent non disbursement of the cess amounts." The Bench directed them to publicise the schemes in six weeks and file an affidavit. Giving general directions to all the States, the Bench said: "It is clear from the affidavits filed on behalf of most of the States and Union Territories that they are not holding meetings of the Welfare Board as required, i.e., at least once in two months, to discharge their statutory functions. Further, it is also apparent that audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General has not been conducted of the funds placed at the disposal of the concerned authority. We may also notice that large funds are lying with the said welfare boards/authorities, but have not been disbursed. The possibility of these amounts being diverted by the State authority for other heads of expenditure in the respective States/Union Territories cannot be ruled out." (The Hindu 9/2/12)

### **Job scheme led to high farm costs: study (14)**

Bangalore, February 13, 2012: A jump in wages due to labour shortage after the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has led to the cost of farm production increasing by up to 20 per cent in Karnataka, a new study has revealed. The study by Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore, said that after the implementation of the job scheme, labour shortage in agriculture was observed in many villages during kharif sowing season. The scheme was launched in February, 2006. "A majority of villagers were of the view that after the scheme was implemented, the cost of production in agriculture increased by 10 to 20 per cent because of labour shortage," said the study titled 'Impact of NREGA on wage rate, food security and rural urban migration in Karnataka.' Authors of the study, Pramod Kumar, professor and head, Agriculture Development and Rural Transformation Centre, and I. Maruthi, said daily wages in the farm sector increased by 50 per cent. "Works under MNREGA should be taken up in such a way that labourers are employed after the sowing and harvesting seasons of rabi and kharif are over. This planning has to be done at the panchayat, block and district levels depending upon the cropping pattern of the respective regions," they said. Researchers studied the performance of the scheme in villages of Bidar, Bellary, Chamarajanagar, Chikmagalur and Dharwad districts in 254 households. "A majority of households indicated that the scheme has not been

successful in raising their living standards or their consumption levels because it has not provided enough number of days of work to make a significant dent on the poverty level," it said. Against 100 days of guaranteed employment, the State provided an average only 35 days of employment in 2008-09, 57 days in 2009-10 and 32 days in 2010-11 (up to November 2010). The percentage share of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women in the total man-days was 17, 10 and 45, respectively. "The average wage rate was recorded at Rs. 86 per day under the scheme whereas the stipulated minimum wage for unskilled labour in Karnataka is fixed at Rs. 119," the study said. On the positive side, over 60 participants viewed that the scheme had given greater independence to women while 37 per cent agreed that it provided protection against extreme poverty. Around 45 per cent indicated that it helped to reduce distress migration from villages to towns and cities. (The Hindu 13/2/12)

#### **Delhi unveils financial assistance schemes for industrial workers (14)**

NEW DELHI, February 14, 2012: In line with the benefits extended to construction workers earlier this month, the Delhi Government has now announced medical benefits, financial support and higher compensation packages for various other categories of workers, including those working in industries and covered by the Industrial Workers Act. Delhi Labour and Industries Minister Ramakant Goswami announced the benefits on Monday. Chairing a meeting of the Delhi Labour Welfare Board, he said the new benefits have been granted to workers and their family members to provide them a comprehensive social safety mechanism. The benefits will cover the workers who are contributing to the Delhi Labour Welfare Board. Under this financial assistance scheme, Rs.20,000 will be sanctioned for treatment of chronic or serious ailments like cancer, brain tumour, heart disease, AIDS, and the like. Apart from this, an amount of Rs.2,000 would also be released now as compensation in case of death of such workers and Rs.5,000 as funeral expenses. The Minister said under the financial assistance scheme the Delhi Labour Welfare Board would also help the workers at crucial points in life such as marriage, birth of child and education of children. He said Rs.10,000 would be paid to workers at the time of their marriage. Similarly, an amount of Rs.5,000 will be released as maternity benefit to those female workers who are not covered under ESIC. Further, Rs.5,000 will be sanctioned as financial assistance for education to handicapped children of workers. A number of scholarship schemes have also been introduced for the workers. Mr. Goswami said Rs.1,000 per month would be sanctioned as scholarship to workers for their children studying in Class X, XI and XII. Besides, Rs.1,500 per month would be sanctioned as scholarship for polytechnic courses and three year engineering diploma courses to both the workers and their children. And an amount of Rs.2,000 per month would be granted for bachelor degree courses in engineering, medicine, law, computer science, agriculture, IT, computer application and other such professional courses. (The Hindu 14/2/12)

#### **Congress' pet project, rural job scheme, faces grant cut (14)**

NEW DELHI, February 15, 2012: The Congress' flagship programme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, is facing a big cut in its budgetary grant for the first time since its launch in 2006. The budgetary support for the current financial year was a tad lower at Rs. 40,000 crore but the progress of the MGNREGS has been so bad that the UPA government is now set to slash the allocation for the job scheme for the poor for the 2012-13 financial year by 10 to 20 per cent. It is just a question of reconciling perceptions on the extent of deduction to be made. The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), the Finance Ministry and the Planning Commission differ on the size of the cut, but all seem to be unanimous on allocating less for the MGNREGS given the government's adverse fiscal position. The MoRD is keen on ensuring that the allocation for the Ministry and for drinking water and sanitation is in no way less than the annual grant of Rs. 88,000 crore provided for in 2011-12. Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh has been angling for better funding and execution of drinking water schemes and sanitation, thanks to the acute problem confronting the people across the country. According to the latest statistics, about 60 per cent of the population practises open defecation. Mr. Ramesh is aiming for a higher allocation for improving drinking water facilities and setting up toilets for better hygiene and cleanliness. If his proposal gets the nod, the budgetary allocation for ministries under his control will exceed Rs. 90,000 crore. But in any case, the allocation for the MGNREGS is likely to be cut by Rs. 4000 crore-Rs. 8000 crore. How poor the progress of the scheme has been during the current financial year could be gauged from the fact that the States spent only Rs. 20,866 crore, out of Rs. 22,251 crore released by the Centre, on providing jobs and creating assets till December-end. Thus the expenditure is just about 50 per cent of the budgetary allocation and the figures are unlikely to change

drastically by March-end. In 2010-11, the Union government released Rs. 35,768.95 crore and consequently the States had a whopping fund of Rs. 54,172.14 crore at their disposal. The expenditure was Rs. 39,377.27 crore. Till December-end only 3.77 crore households had been provided employment down from 5.49 crore in 2010-11 and consequently, the man-days of work created were 120.88 crore as against 257.15 crore a year ago. The jobs provided to the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women too came down drastically to 27.4 crore, 20.69 crore and 59.82 crore man-days. Compare this with the figure for the three categories a year ago — 78.76 crore, 53.62 crore and 122.74 crore man-days. (The Hindu 15/2/12)

#### **Ministry sought for construction workers, unorganised labourers (14)**

VELLORE, February 21, 2012 The All India Construction Workers' and Unorganised Workers' Development Association has urged the Central and Tamil Nadu governments to establish a separate department and Ministry for the welfare of construction workers and unorganised workers. A resolution was adopted at the Tamil Nadu State and Vellore district executive committee meeting of the association held under the presidentship of all-India president G.R. Paramasivam here recently. The resolution also pleaded for the implementation of Employees State Insurance, Provident Fund, pension and housing schemes for the construction workers and unorganised workers. The association requested the governments not to stop the benefits available to construction/unorganised workers in the welfare boards for them on the grounds that similar benefits were available under the social security scheme. It decided to start a cooperative housing society for construction workers and unorganised workers to facilitate these categories of workers to obtain housing loans on a par with government servants. R.T. Palani, general secretary of the All India Construction Workers' and Unorganised Workers' Development Association has been elected president of the cooperative housing society. Through another resolution, the meeting requested the State government to ensure that education, marriage and maternity allowances for the children and spouses of construction workers were disbursed within a month of receiving application. (The Hindu 21/2/12)

#### **Activists to fight for pension rights of daily wagers (14)**

Pune: The members of Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) and SWaCH will participate in the Pension Parishad on February 25 to force the government to consider the workers of the unorganised sector for the pension scheme. Pension Parishad is an initiative to restore the right to pension for the members of the unorganised sector under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme. Workers from all over the country will attend the Pension Parishad to be held between 2 pm and 5 pm at Sahil Chowk, Shivaji Market Yard. "The Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme provides a monthly pension of Rs500 to persons over 60 years, who fall in the below poverty line (BPL) bracket," said Lakshmi Nayaran, secretary KKPKP. All the working poor, who are not covered under any legislation, should automatically be covered under the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008. Waste pickers, domestic workers, construction workers, quarry workers, hamals, street vendors and autorickshaw drivers constitute 93% of the country's workforce and contribute 50% to India's gross domestic product (GDP). The government of India enacted the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act in 2008 in response to consistent demands from unorganised workers. However, NGOs say it has no provisions for central funds, no financial commitment and no legal binding on the government. "The worst situation is of the aging poor or those who are unable to work on account of disability. They are the most helpless and vulnerable," said Dipanwita Sengupta, KKPKP activist. (DNA 24/2/12)

#### **Pension plan for unorganised sector labourers (14)**

PUNE: A national pension adalat seeking pension and social security for the 44 crore unorganised labourers in the country, will be hosted in the city on February 25. Organisations working for the unorganised sectors will submit a list of their demands during the adalat. Social activist and founder of the Hamal Panchayat, Baba Adhav, is instrumental in organising the national pension adalat on 'Social Security and Pension Scheme for unorganised sector'. Speaking to TOI, Adhav said, "The unorganised sector contributes 62 paise in the every rupee generated in the country, while the rest comes from organised sector and the business community. Despite this, the government has no schemes for providing assistance to the unorganised." Adhav said the pension scheme can be addressed in two stages. "Those who are already old and cannot do any laborious work should be immediately made part

of the pension scheme and provide financial assistance at regular intervals. The government can form a contributory scheme for others, who are still working. These people can contribute a part of their earnings and the rest will be borne by the government. It will be like the provident fund for employees in the organised sectors," Adhav said. If schemes like permanent account number (PAN) card can be launched successfully across the country, similar scheme can be launched for the unorganised labourers. Once they get a permanent identification number, they will be able to get benefit of the pension and social security schemes even if they migrate in search for work, he added. Nitin Pawar, convener of Angamehanati Kashtakari Sangharsh Samiti, said, "The Union government has introduced National Insurance Scheme for people living below poverty line, who are part of unorganised sector. But, others like domestic help, waste-pickers, traditional workers like barber or ironsmiths are not covered, which is unfortunate." There are different types of problems when it comes to implementation, he pointed out. "The Union government has formed a welfare board for unorganised sector and it was expected that states would form similar boards at state level, but some states have not done so. The Union government has said that it can not launch any scheme for the unorganised because some states have still not formed the welfare boards. In some states welfare boards that have been set up have become defunct and maintaining them is a sheer loss of public money. But nobody cares about it," Pawar said. (Times of India 24/2/12)

#### **Central Trade Union call Nation wide bandh on Feb 28 (14)**

Imphal, February 26 2012: The Central Trade Union has called a country-wide general strike pursuing various demands on February 28 . Co-ordinating Body of Trade Unions, Manipur will also join the stir to be imposed from 6 am to 6 pm in the State. Although, nine Central Trade Unions will jointly clamp the general strike in other States, it will be called in the State by six different Central Trade Unions. Speaking to reporters in a press conference held at Irawat Bhavan today, Co-ordinating Body of Trade Unions, Manipur Convenor L Sotinkumar said, staff of banks, LIC offices, telecom, telegraph, transport and post offices would cease works on the day. Drivers, rickshaw pullers and mutiya workers and street vendors would also join the stir, he added. Sotinkumar further said, around 400 mutiya workers would stage sit-in-protest from 10 am to 2 pm at Dharmashala on the day. Various trade union leaders would address the sit-in-protest, he added. The ongoing HSLC and HSSLC examinations would be exempted during the general strike, said the convenor and added that examinations which fall on the day have been postponed in West Bengal. He added that the stir would demand for taking up of necessary measures to curb price rise/inflation, providing concession packages to entrepreneurs, implementation of basic labour laws, taking up of measures to curb violation of labour laws, providing universal security to unorganised sector workers, preparation of national security fund and funding to profit earning PSUs of Central and State Governments. The stir would also demand stringent punishment to individuals who loot national wealth, confiscation of black money stashed away to foreign countries, providing of equal wage and benefits to contract workers and regular workers, taking up of necessary steps to provide atleast Rs 10, 000 per month to workers with the amendment of Minimum Wages Act, increment of gratuity and providing pension to all the citizens of the country. The general strike would also press on issuance of registration order to trade unions within 45 days of application, implementation of convention numbers 87 and 98 of ILO, providing wages and honarium regularly to workers engaged under Central sponsored flagship programmes and preparations of a street vendors policy. The stir would also demand for repeal of AFSPA, completion of national highways construction within one year, setting up of a highway protection force, providing employment allowance to unemployed youths, setting up of industries which can generate more number of employment, providing free education to wards of workers in Government and private schools. Sotinkumar said that another reason for calling the general strike is that the State and Central governments have failed to fulfil the demands of the trade unions although different forms of agitation have been staged from time to time. He added that the government has given hardships to general public by increasing electricity and water taxes, prices of diesel, petrol, fertilizers and other essential commodities. Joint Convenor of the Co-ordinating Body, Ksh Shanta said that the Government must provide pension to workers of unorganised sectors as well. It is also informed that many shopkeepers of Thangal Bazar and Paona Bazar have not got their salary due to lesser business after new traffic system was put effective, he added. (Manipur E-Pao 27/2/12)

#### **Worker security on govt agenda (14)**

Patna, Feb. 29: The state cabinet today gave the nod to the Bihar Shatabdi Unorganised Sector Workers

and Artisans Social Security Scheme, 2011. The scheme will replace the Aam Admi Bima Yojana — a central programme that covers death and permanent disability for the benefit of landless families in rural areas. The new scheme will benefit and be payable to workers and artisans or their dependents and children under various schemes. The programme, which will be extended to entire Bihar, will take into account the beneficiaries from April 1, 2011. Under the scheme, a self-employed person of the state, who earns a livelihood from professions like blacksmith, basket making, bullock/cycle or hard cart pulling, carpentry, autorickshaw driving and others, are covered. The labour department would implement the scheme and the money would be given to the deserving persons through the district administration. Sources said in case of accidental death of a worker or an artisan, a grant of Rs 1 lakh shall be paid to his/her legal dependent under the scheme. In case of natural death of a worker or an artisan, a grant of Rs 30,000 shall be paid to his legal dependent. Moreover, in case of permanent total disability, a grant of Rs 75,000 shall be paid while in case of partial disability a grant of Rs 37,500 shall be paid. Apart from these, the scheme also covers the provision for scholarships to children of workers and artisans. Under the scheme, Rs 1,200 (Rs 100 every month for a year) shall be paid as scholarship to a maximum of two children of a worker or artisan studying in classes IX to XII, government polytechnic and long-term trades in government industrial training institutes in Bihar. However, if the child fails in an examination, the financial assistance shall be paid to him next year. A senior official at the labour department, on condition of anonymity, said: "Under the medical insurance, various diseases have been covered, which include cancer surgical Rs 25,000, non-surgical Rs 15,000, similarly for heart disease the amount will be Rs 30,000. For renal kidney disease, the amount is Rs 30,000." The official added that many other diseases are covered under the scheme, which includes brain tumour, AIDS, total hip or knee replacement, major vascular surgery, bone marrow transplantation, spinal surgery and others. In another cabinet decision taken today, Rs 3 crore has been sanctioned under Rogi Kalyan Kendra for patients. Moreover, under the panchayati raj department, Rs 92 crore was earmarked for providing allowances to president and vice-president of the district board, chief and deputy chief of the panchayat samiti. The cabinet approved 22 decisions today. (The Telegraph 1/3/12)

#### **TRDCL seeks action against street vendors (14)**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: A letter seeking immediate action against encroachers on city footpaths will be submitted to chief minister Oommen Chandy, by Thiruvananthapuram road development company limited (TRDCL), on Tuesday. The company, entrusted with city road improvement project (CRIP), has been forced to put off work in many places due to the presence of street vendors. The letter will give details of encroachments in various corridors coming under CRIP, with pictures. It will elaborate on how the encroachments delay the completion of the project. "In many places we are forced to stop the work. The labourers have to refrain from laying tiles and landscaping. If the footpath is not free we can't take the work forward," said Anilkumar Pandala, vice-president, TRDCL. The second hand book-sellers in front of Ayurveda college, the tea-shacks along Museum-Nandavanam road, tender coconut vendors at Uppidamoodu bridge, the milma booth at Palayam-General hospital road, the string of shops along airport-beach road, shanties that function as eateries at night, banana chips vendors along the press club road, KELPALM stalls and Matsyafed outlets surrounding the secretariat are a few encroachments that have found mention in the letter. The company will argue that the conduct of such business is a violation of the court order and it could amount to punishable offence. Section 4 of the Public Ways Act clearly states that no person shall cause any obstruction by conducting any business on any public way. "It is illegal and we want the government to enforce the law and facilitate our work," said Pandala. He added that as per the agreement between road fund board and TRDCL, the government was responsible to ensure encumbrance free worksites for TRDCL. "We have filed many complaints in this regard before, but to no effect. If the government fails to act, the project is going to be delayed, for which we will not be responsible," Pandala said. Although the company officials had asked the illegal street vendors to shift to another location, many times they did not oblige. The company had sought the intervention of corporation to evict the vendors, in the past. (Times of India 4/3/12)

#### **Fund boost: MPs can now dip into MGNREGA kitty (14)**

New Delhi, March 04, 2012: MPs, who already get R5 crore each to develop their constituencies, suddenly have more funds to dip into. The government has made available to them money under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), its flagship livelihood programme. The statistics and programme implementation ministry, which monitors the Member of

Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS), has decided to converge the fund with MGNREGA after representations from MPs, who wanted to use the additional resources to 'connect' with their constituency. The decision centralises the use of MGNREGA funds once again. Till now, gram panchayats used to decide works under MGNREGA. Now, MPs can recommend MGNREGA works suiting their constituencies under MPLADS. MGNREGA is budgeted at Rs 40,000 crore for the current financial year. Access to its funds is a win-win for parliamentarians, who face Lok Sabha elections in two years. They also get a shot at local recognition, with a plaque erected permanently at the asset built and showing the MPs' names and funds contributed. Nikhil Dey of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, an RTI and right to work NGO, backed the new concept. "The convergence model will give an impetus to MGNREGA and bring transparency to MPLADS," he said. MGNREGA was launched by the UPA in 2006. It has so far generated over 1,100 crore man-days of work at an expenditure of over Rs 1,50,000 crore, making it the world's largest works entitlement programme. (The Hindustan Times 4/3/12)

#### **41 p.c. of bonded labourers in State come from KBK region (14)**

BHUBANESWAR, March 11, 2012: The KBK districts, which are regarded as a backward region of the country, have contributed 41 per cent to the total bonded labourers in the State. According to the latest Economic Survey, by the end of 2010-11, 50,792 bonded labourers including 13,904 from scheduled caste and 20,424 Scheduled Tribe communities were identified in the State. "Of the 50,792 bonded labourers, 49,013 were released and out of them 47,056 including 13,121 SCs and 18,369 STs were rehabilitated," the survey says. The rehabilitation of bonded labourers has, however, been a controversial issue. As there is inadequate leasable government land and homestead land available, rehabilitation of released bonded labourers has hit roadblock in different districts. Although the State government directed district administration to provide agricultural land to released bonded labourers no visible improvement in condition of these hapless population has been noticed. During past five years, about 1,500 migrant labourers belonging to Orissa were released from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. However, many of the bonded labourers are yet to be meaningfully rehabilitated. According to Umi Daniel of Migration information & Resources Centre (MiRC), of the 700 bonded labourers were identified by the State government in 2002 in Malkangiri district, only 17 people were rehabilitated under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 due to intervention of NHRC. According to the economic survey, unemployment has been estimated at 14.13 lakh person years at the beginning of 2007-08. The annual growth rates of labour force and the work force have been estimated as 1.38 per cent and 1.55 per cent respectively and the projected end-of-the-year unemployment rate has been estimated as 8.76 per cent in 2011-12 against 9.37 per cent in 2007-08. (The Hindu 11/3/12)

#### **New schemes in the offing for livelihood security (14)**

New Delhi, March 12 : Factfile on new schemes in the offing to ensure livelihood security as enunciated by President Pratibha Patil during her joint address to parliament on the opening day of the budget session: \* Soon-to-be-launched national urban livelihood mission for imparting large-scale skill upgradation, entrepreneurship development, wage employment and self-employment opportunities. \* Integrated child development services will be restructured and financially strengthened during the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17). While at the heart of the scheme's revamp is addressing malnutrition, a new multi-sectoral nutrition programme will be launched in 200 high-burden districts focusing on maternal and child nutrition needs. \* Major amendments in the child labour act to prohibit employment of children under the age of 14. \* New legislation to safeguard and promote the livelihood of street vendors. \* National mission for teachers to improve teacher's education and faculty development in the education system. \* New bill for eliminating manual scavenging and insanitary latrines. The bill aims at providing proper rehabilitation of manual scavengers in alternative occupations to enable them lead a life of dignity. \* New legislation being considered for the disabled to replace the existing act. A separate department of disability affairs is also proposed to be set up for greater focus on addressing issues confronting the disabled. \* National council for senior citizens being set up as a participatory forum. \* National programme to be launched for the urban homeless to create a network of composite shelters in urban local bodies, with adequate provisions for housing and food for the destitute. \* E-auction of 839 FM radio channels in 245 cities to expand the reach of radio services to small towns and remote areas such as the northeast and Jammu and Kashmir. (IANS) (New Kerala 12/3/12)

#### **Migration from rural areas on the rise (14)**

Koppal, March 12, 2012: Migration of people from rural areas to cities in search of employment is on the rise following the failure of the authorities to ensure proper implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The failure of monsoon last year has hit life hard in most of the rural areas in the district. Those living in rural areas have no means of earning, owing to the lack of cultivation. There is a shortage of drinking water supply in villages, and farmers and agricultural labourers have been worst hit. They have been put under financial pressure and have been facing fodder shortage to feed their cattle. Payment of wages Agricultural labourers and farmers holding small and marginal lands have become jobless. Hundreds of people have filed their applications with the gram panchayats concerned seeking employment under the MGNREGA. But the panchayats have not been able to process their applications. The zilla panchayat has not settled some long-pending bills towards the payment of wages to the beneficiaries under the scheme. Non-coordination between officials and elected representatives has affected the implementation of the scheme. Apart from pending payment of wages to the beneficiaries in the last three years, the zilla panchayat has not been able to utilise the available funds under the job scheme. During 2011-12, the Government released Rs. 85 crore to the zilla panchayat for implementing the scheme. But so far it has been able to show an expenditure of only around Rs. 25 crore. Since the past four months, those from surrounding villages in Raichur taluk, including Malliabad, Mittimalkapur, Bichhali, Siddrampur, Manslapur, Yergera and Bijjanger, have been migrating to Raichur. Around 500 to 600 people, including women and children, reach the city every morning and congregate at main market circles like Teen-Khadil, Shashi Mahal Circle and Shettybhavi Circle hoping to draw the attention of agents to work as construction labourers. Increased competition, has led to brokers exploiting the situation. (The Hindu 12/3/12)

#### **'Extend rural job scheme to urban areas' (14)**

New Delhi, March 15 : Calling for effective measures to improve the efficiency of social sector programmes, the Economic Survey for 2011-12 has suggested extending the government's ambitious rural jobs scheme to urban areas, strengthening panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) and skill improvement for enhanced employability. The survey, which was presented by Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee in parliament Thursday, said that programmes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) have been instrumental in creating employment opportunities and placing additional income in the hands of the poor. It said that additional income for the rural poor had contributed to demand for consumer durables and non-durables to sustain the supply side, though at higher food inflation. Noting that India lags behind not only China but also Sri Lanka and many other neighbouring countries in terms of human resource development, it said additional fiscal space available needs to be utilised for this through growth-oriented social sector programmes. It said that bottom-up approach in implementing rural development programmes can be achieved only by making PRIs more vibrant. Citing the example of MGNREGS, the survey said it provided for preparing district perspective plans for five years. "The PRIs have to play the principal role in preparation of this perspective plan. Since PRIs and gram sabhas are not adequately informed of the provisions of the Act and the processes involved, these plans are generally not prepared or are left to the bureaucracy and so the planning process merely becomes an action plan for utilisation of resources and therefore falls short of expectations," the survey said. Suggesting improvements in MGNREGS, it said "shifting to permanent asset building under the programme, better monitoring, skill improvement for enhanced employability and extension of the legislation to urban areas can yield better results." "It also needs to be ensured that implementation of the programme does not result in shortage of labour during the peak agricultural season for which PRIs and gram sabhas have to be adequately sensitised," it added. The survey said there is need to quickly link UID (Unique Identification number) to all social sector programmes "for better monitorable outcomes." The survey said coverage under MGNREGA had increased from 4.51 crore households in 2008-09 to 5.49 crore households in 2010-11 with averaged employment of 47 persondays per household. Average wage had increased from Rs 65 in 2006-07 to Rs. 100 in 2010-11. It said the government has initiated a service delivery project for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and biometrics related works of MGNREGA on PPP (public private partnership) basis to strengthen transparency . The Government, it added, had set up a committee for developing an index for fixing MGNREGA wage rates and their periodic revision. "Till such time a satisfactory index is proposed by the committee and accepted by the government, a decision has been taken to index wage rates notified under MGNREGA to the Consumer Price Index for agricultural labour," the survey said. It said Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana had been reshaped as National Rural Livelihood Mission and

about 42.05 lakh self-help groups (SHGs) have been formed since its inception. The survey said that over 19,443 km of all-weather roads have been completed during 2011-12 (up to December) under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. It said unit cost norms have been revised under Indira Awas Yojana and 27.15 lakh houses were constructed against the target of 29.09 lakh in 2010-11. The survey said about 72 percent of rural habitations were fully covered with safe drinking water and about 13 crore Aadhaar (UID) numbers have already been generated. (IANS) (New Kerala 15.3.12)

#### **Adequate funds available for MGNREGS: Jairam Ramesh (14)**

NEW DELHI, March 18, 2012: The Centre on Saturday asserted that adequate funds were available during the 2012-13 financial year to meet job demands by below poverty line (BPL) households under the Mahatma Gandhi NREGS. Union Minister of Rural Development Jairam Ramesh underlined that he has recommended reallocation of funds for rural development, especially for drinking water and sanitation projects, to ensure inclusive growth and reflect the percolation of the high growth rate to the rural side. At the budget preparation stage, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee had proposed reduction in the allocation for MGNREGS to Rs. 35,000 crore from Rs. 40,000 crore provided in 2011-12. However, on Mr. Ramesh's suggestion, he increased the cut to Rs. 7000 crore and provided Rs. 33,000 crore for 2012-13. Mr. Ramesh said that he proposed higher reduction because Rs. 6000 crore was already available with the States as their opening balance and the States' contribution of Rs. 3300 crore actually ensures availability of Rs. 42,300 crore. He said the available fund was adequate to meet the demands for job given the anticipated expenditure during the current financial year was Rs. 38,000 crore. Mr. Ramesh assured that the Finance Minister would revisit the numbers in November depending on the quality of monsoon. "If the monsoons are good, demand for jobs will be less. But if it is bad, then there would be a higher demand for jobs. More money would then be provided," Mr. Ramesh maintained. He pointed out that though the States had projected a labour budget of Rs. 60,000 crore for 2011-12, the anticipated expenditure was much less at Rs. 38,000 against the Rs. 58,000 crore available with them. Other carry-forward expenditures during the current financial year leaves them with just Rs. 6000 crore as opening balance in 2012-13. Mr. Ramesh said the notion that funds had been slashed were completely bogus. The reduction was to ensure that more funds were made available for drinking water and sanitation, he asserted. (The Hindu 18/3/12)

#### **UPA's flagship MNREGA dying in Congress-ruled Rajasthan (14)**

Bundi (Rajasthan): The UPA Government's flagship Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is dying in Congress-ruled Rajasthan, the Community Score Card (CSC), a tool for assessing accountability in government projects, has claimed. The CSC is funded by Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA) in South Asian Region and implemented in Rajasthan by social organisation CUTS (Consumer Unity Trust) International. The data was presented at a state-level dissemination cum advocacy meeting held at Jaipur on March 14, 2012. The data mentioned a drastic decline in the number of families engaged in employment in MNREGS. The number of families given jobs under the scheme has gone down from 63.69 lakh in 2008-09 to 58.24 lakh in 2010-11 and the same further declined 1.37 lakh till March 7, 2012. The CSC study data further disclosed that the Rajasthan government could utilise only 50 per cent of the total labour budget demanded for the Financial Year 2010-11 while it was as high as 64 per cent in 2008-2009. This indicates that half of the money provided by central government remained unspent which could have been utilised for betterment of the state. The state could provide only 52 person days of employment per family in the Financial Year 2010-11 in comparison to 76 person days Financial Year 2008-09. The total expenditure in MNREGS has also drastically gone down from 6175.55 crore in 2008-09 to 3300.33 crore in 2010-11. All these findings were disseminated in the state level dissemination cum advocacy meeting organised by Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) on March 14, 2012. Several prominent speakers and the grass root community based organisations from all the 33 districts were present in the dissemination meeting of the project. (The Financial Express 22/3/12)

#### **Workers to protest against corruption in NREGA (14)**

JAIPUR: Picking up from where they had left about two years ago, hundreds of MGNREGA workers across the state will once again assemble near the Statue Circle on Thursday to protest against corrupt practices under the scheme and repeated assaults on whistleblowers. In 2010, hundreds of MGNREGA workers had gathered at the same spot for a demonstration that lasted 47 days drawing the entire

nation's attention towards anomalies existing in UPA government's flagship programme. Most of the promises made by the government then remain unfulfilled. "The special social audit that the state was supposed to ensure is not happening anymore. FIRs have not been lodged in half of the 31 cases of anomalies that the government had detected then. Also, RTI activists seeking information on MGNREGA schemes are being beaten up in the state. It is these issues that the demonstration will highlight," says Nikhil Dey of the Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) that will spearhead the agitation. Dey says MGNREGA is failing to meet the aspirations of people. With villagers complaining about not getting work on demand, even as officials maintain they never received applications, the scheme is going through a crisis period in the state. "Employment figures are plummeting, wages are still too low, and corruption is rampant. The promises made to us during our last agitation of providing minimum wages have not materialized, payments are not being made on time and the state government has failed to index its minimum wages to inflation," says Dey. The 'Samvad' dialogue between MGNREGA workers, activists and government officials that should have ideally spread to other social sector programmes and departments, has almost stopped. "One of the best ways of ensuring effective implementation of the Act would have been effective social audit. But, it is being killed in Rajasthan, the place of its birth. As a result, none of our reforms will really work," he adds. The issue of Dhurra Ram, an RTI activist who was beaten mercilessly in Somalsar village, Nokha, Bikaner by the son of a sarpanch will also be taken up. Dhurra Ram has been instrumental in bringing out anomalies of about Rs 4.5 crore in the Somalsar village through an RTI application. "The panchayat there has shown an expense of Rs 4.5 crore in removing sand from a mud road under MGNREGA when he is not entitled to undertake such work under the scheme. Not just that the sand was suppose to have been removed at a time when sands least clog roads in this area. This was a sheer anomaly that Dhurra Ram was pursuing when he was beaten up to such an extent that he had to suffer 10 fractures. But till date no one has been arrested," says Dey. (Times of India 22/3/12)

#### **'Gujarat lags in spending on welfare of construction workers' (14)**

Ahmedabad: Gujarat is lagging behind many other large states and has spent a mere Rs 41 lakh, or 0.21 per cent, of the Rs 190.22 crore it has collected from thousands of unorganised construction workers for their welfare, the reply to a question in Rajya Sabha shows. Last week's reply from the Labour Ministry was to a question regarding the implementation of twin central legislations — the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Act, 1996 and Cess Act, 1996 — for unorganised construction workers under which workers are registered with a welfare board and cess is collected from them. This is then spent on providing healthcare and pension to the workers and education for their children. In Gujarat, most such workers are from the eastern tribal belt, or inter-state migrant workers, who live and work in the cities for about eight months a year with their children, setting up temporary shelters, mostly near the construction sites. The Rajya Sabha was told that 48,971 such workers had been registered with the welfare board in Gujarat. Eleven other states — Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal — have registered more workers. As per the reply, Gujarat's Welfare Board had collected Rs 190.22 crore as cess, while Haryana, MP, Karnataka, Kerala, WB and Delhi had collected larger amounts. As for using this money on welfare, Gujarat spent Rs 41 lakh. This was lower than the spending of 13 states, including AP, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, MP, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, UP, WB, Delhi, Puducherry and even Arunachal Pradesh, which spent more than six times than Gujarat, though it hosts just one-eleventh the number of workers registered in Gujarat. (Indian Express 22/3/12)

#### **Panel moots minimum social security package for unorganised sector (14)**

New Delhi, March 25: The Government should define and notify a minimum social security package for 430 million unorganised sector workers. The package should have a life and disability cover, financial protection against ill-health, maternity benefit and a pension plan. These are some of the recommendations made by the Working Group of the National Advisory Council (NAC) on Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act 2008. The draft suggests creation of a single-window to implement the package, as also a cess to cover some of the costs. A special purpose vehicle or an independent authority at the national level, called the National Social Security Authority, should be set up for the purpose. The draft, which invited public comments till March 22, will now be considered by the NAC, headed by UPA Chairperson, Ms Sonia Gandhi. For the maternity scheme, the draft says there is already an ongoing scheme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, being piloted in 52 districts. If this

scheme is fully rolled out over the 12th Plan, the likely allocation (with full coverage) is likely to be around Rs 12,000 crore. "This is already provided as one of the entitlements under the proposed National Food Security Bill 2011 that has been introduced in Parliament," it says. As regards financial protection against ill health, the funds will have to come from the Ministries of Health as well as Labour. Also, the Planning Commission is considering an increase in public spending on health from around 1.2 per cent of GDP to around 2 per cent of GDP. For the proposed life-cum-disability plus pension plan, additional financial allocations will need to be made by the Government. With a worker's annual contribution of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000, respectively, the total cost of this scheme after full coverage (both Centre and States) is likely to range between Rs 43,000-86,000 crore a year. Since the financial allocations for implementing this plan are likely to be around Rs 2,000-4,000 crore a year each for the Central and State Governments, the "Government may consider a cess to cover the increase in costs," it suggests. The draft also suggests inclusion of all workers in the Act, barring those already registered with and covered by the provident fund and ESI scheme and the self-employed who pay income tax. Unorganised sector workers, a large chunk of which is women, constitute 93 per cent of the workforce. The sector contributes to an estimated 60 per cent of GDP, 55 per cent of national savings and 47 per cent of all exports, says the draft. (HBL 25/3/12)

#### **Employment Guarantee Scheme work is not permanent employment, rules HC (14)**

NAGPUR: In a significant verdict, the Nagpur bench of Bombay high court has ruled that employment under employment guarantee scheme (EGS) cannot be defined as employment in an industry. Justice Ravi Deshpande set aside a judgment passed by Bhandara Industrial Court on July 13, 2005, directing the state forest department to regularize 13 workers earlier working under EGS as van majoors in Group D category. The industrial court had declared that the forest department had engaged in unfair labour practice as per the Maharashtra Recognition of Trade Unions and Prevention of Unfair Labour Practices Act (MRTU&PULP) Act by issuing an order on September 14, 2001, directing these 13 workers to work under EGS. However, justice Deshpande rejected the industrial court's finding that by transferring the services of workers to EGS, the department has committed an unfair labour practice under the act. "To transfer employees to work under EGS is not an unfair labour practice under MRTU&PULP Act. There is neither any award, settlement, agreement or statutory provision that confers any right upon the respondent workers to get the job other than one under EGS. There is no prohibition on the department to provide the work to them under EGS," the court observed. "The industrial court has therefore committed an error in holding that the work performed by respondents under EGS has to be treated as a normal one performed in the industry," the judge added. The 13 respondents who were working with the forest department had filed a complaint in the industrial court under MRTU&PULP Act, alleging that they had been continuously working on daily basis as majoors since 1987-88 and were being paid a salary on nominal muster roll (NMR). Citing various Supreme Court and high court judgments, Justice Deshpande quashed the industrial court orders, observing that the appointment of a daily wager is not an appointment to any post. (Times of India 26/3/12)

#### **Pay allowance to registered unemployed youth: Centre to states (14)**

New Delhi: The government has communicated to all states the recommendation of a parliamentary panel for payment of unemployment allowances to youths registered with employment exchanges. "The desire of the standing committee of paying unemployment allowances to registered unemployed youth with employment exchanges have been communicated to all states," a standing committee on labour report tabled in Parliament today said. The action taken by the Labour and Employment Ministry came in the wake of the suggestions of the panel that while some states such as Chhattisgarh, Harayana, Punjab and Kerala are paying unemployment allowances, others should follow suit. The panel report said the Ministry has also proposed to set up a tripartite committee which will look into the issue relating to private placement agencies and "how to control and regulate their illegitimate activities". While the panel has expressed concern over some private placement agencies mislead unemployed youths, the Ministry said the issue was being debated at various levels with much "severity". The committee also drew the attention of the Labour Ministry that the expenditure as compared to the cess collected under the construction workers cess is almost nil in some states while nominal in other. The Ministry, according to the report, has replied that the Centre was pursuing with the states for speedy implementation of the provisions of the Act governing benefits for construction workers. While a special group has been constituted under the Labour Secretary to monitor and review implementation of the Act, the Ministry has also informed that the state governments have been asked to workout an action plan for giving adequate publicity about their

rights and benefits. (Indian Express 27/3/12)

### **Rs 33k cr rural jobs scheme didn't work, admits Govt (14)**

NEW DELHI: It was UPA 1's winning mantra. But the Rs 33,000 crore a year rural job guarantee scheme may be floundering with the government admitting the flagship programme suffers from delayed payments, poor awareness, lack of durable assets, faulty job cards and muster rolls. The finance ministry has echoed some of the major criticisms of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act listing endemic "lack of awareness about rights and entitlements" and inability of workers' to submit written applications as significant drawbacks. Patchy maintenance of records like job cards, dated receipts and incomplete muster rolls also indicate the scheme is not reaching beneficiaries or is prone to leaks and manipulation. Shortage of dedicated personnel is affecting the task of measuring and certifying completed works. Responding to queries posed by members of Parliament's standing committee on finance, the ministry notes "delay in wage payments and poor coverage of banks and post offices" along with "conduct and quality of social audits" are among major challenges experienced during implementation of the job scheme. More than five years after its rollout - during which it has been hailed for boosting the rural economy and being a buffer against extreme penury - opinion is more divided with calls for recasting the job scheme growing louder and some quarters insisting the programme embodies non-productive expenditure. A major lacunae that MNREGA funds are used for works of a non-permanent nature and divert government spending from more productive sectors of the economy is reflected in the ministry's assessment that there is a need to "make assets more durable and productive." Without permanent assets, the money would evaporate. The finance ministry's comments are an official endorsement of the ills that have crept into the scheme with feedback from states and MPs often indicating that district administrations were hard put to spend sanctioned amounts and often took to sanctioning unnecessary works to use the funds. False records and local functionaries hoarding job cards or extracting cuts is common. In its submission, the finance ministry does note that the rural employment ministry has tried to increase awareness, increase administrative expenditure, expand use of information technology, institute audits and provide for independent monitoring and verification. Other aspects of MNREGA that need attention, according to the finance ministry include slow grievance redress that is complicated by beneficiaries finding it difficult to approach authorities. The task becomes even more hazardous if those in office are responsible for malpractices in the first place. (Times of India 1/4/12)

### **National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme staff call off stir (14)**

Outsourcing staff of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), who have been on strike for the past one week, have called off their stir following an assurance by MNREGS minister D Manikya Vara Prasad to take a considerate view of the issues raised by them during the cabinet sub-committee meeting on April 3. The strike since March 24 has affected the livelihood of thousands of poor people working under NREGS scheme. Workers such as field assistants, technical staff, programme officers, struck work demanding enhanced wages and regularisation of their services. (Times of India 2/4/12)

### **7,800 NREGS field assistants to be sacked (14)**

HYDERABAD, April 4, 2012: The State government has taken a decision in-principle to remove nearly 7,800 out of the 18,000 field assistants of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) for their poor performance during 2011-12. While taking this decision, the State government has gone by a finding that these 7,800 field assistants have not completed even 25 per cent of the works identified for implementation across villages for 2011-12 ending March 31. This implied that they did not take interest in enrolment of the beneficiaries as per the targets and in wage disbursement, thereby exposing the vulnerable sections to the ill-effects of drought. The plan to remove the under-performers from service comes at a time when they are demanding formulation of an HR policy, besides a hike in their monthly remuneration from Rs.3,200 to Rs.4,200. They had gone on strike from March 24 but called it off on April 1 following an assurance by the government that their demands would be considered by the Cabinet sub-committee dealing with the matter, at its meeting on April 3 which, however, did not take place. (The Hindu 4/4/12)

### **Centre striving for settlement of MGNREGS wage issue (14)**

NEW DELHI, April 7, 2012: At the instance of the Supreme Court, the Union government has initiated

steps for an out-of-the-court settlement of the controversy arising from non-payment of minimum wages to MGNREGS workers. While admitting the Centre's special leave petition challenging the Karnataka High Court ruling in September for payment of minimum wages to workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme along with arrears, the Supreme Court, however, refused to stay the order. The only relief it provided was a stay on payment of wage arrears prior to the High Court order. More importantly, the Supreme Court expressed the hope that the government would not appear adversarial and undertake a consultative process to harmonise MGNREGS wages with minimum wages so as to respect the state minimum wages for agricultural labour. The Karnataka High Court had held unsustainable the Centre's power under the MGNREGA to notify a wage rate less than the minimum wages and quashed the wage rate notified in January 2009. After revising the MGNREGS wage rate for the second time with effect from April 1, 2012, Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh has set the ball rolling to find an out-of-the-court solution to the problem. He has invited Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan leaders Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey for consultations. Mr. Ramesh has decided to invite the petitioners who had knocked on the doors of the Karnataka High Court in the first place with an offer to settle the issue out of court. He gets elbow room for negotiations as the matter, which was to come up for hearing before the Supreme Court on April 9, has since been deferred to August 16. On the advice of the Solicitor-General, Mr. Ramesh has decided to amend the MGNREGA alone without touching the Minimum Wages Act and remove the disparity between the two. Amending the MWA was considered a difficult proposition as it would require the consent of the States as well. Even after the recent revision in the MGNREGS wage rate, it was less than the minimum wages in at least eight States. The hike was pitiable in Orissa, just a Re. 1. The additional burden on the government was estimated as Rs. 472 crore. However, most States are yet to revise the minimum wages this year. When it is done, it is expected to once again widen the disparity with MGNREGS wages. (The Hindu 7/4/12)

#### **More funds for Bengal, but little to show for it (14)**

New Delhi, April 08, 2012: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's antics may have brought in higher central funds for the state, but her government's performance has been below par in its first year. A note prepared by the Planning Commission pointed out that the West Bengal government has been able to achieve just 6.5% of its target in agriculture, and provided only 14 days of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) — the lowest among the poorer states of India. The panel also noted that the overall economic growth also slowed down to around 8% in the state after Banerjee took over from the Left Front government. Banerjee's tirade against the Left, blaming it for its poor state of affairs, resulted in the central government allocating Rs 22,124 crore in 2011-12, an increase of about 20% as compared to the previous year. The Centre also gave another Rs 3,500 crore as a special package after Banerjee met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh earlier this year. However, the panel's report on the state's performance in 2011-12 has shown that the higher allocation may not have translated into action at the ground level. According to it, the Performance of Central flagship schemes such as Indira Awas Yojana, National Rural Health Mission, mid-day meal scheme and Sarva Siksha Abhiyan has been less than 50%. "It is primarily because of the weak institutional mechanism at the block level to implement the schemes," a Planning Commission functionary said. The panel has expressed surprise that even though the state's wheat and pulses production recorded the lowest production in the last six years, the amount of work provided under MGNREGA has also been minimal. "Logically, if agriculture production is low, the demand for work under MGNREGA becomes higher. In West Bengal, both have recorded a low output," an official said. The state, however, has done well in implementing the road sector scheme, Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana, and the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission. (Hindustan Times 8/4/12)

#### **Rs. 5,000 crore allocated for rural employment guarantee scheme (14)**

CHENNAI, April 10, 2012: Chief Minister Jayalalithaa has allowed an allocation of Rs. 5,000 crore for the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) this year, K.P. Munusamy, Municipal Administration and Rural Development Minister, said on Monday. Making a series of announcements at the conclusion of the debate on the demands for grants of his departments, Mr. Munusamy told the Assembly that the Union government had approved the Labour Budget to generate 37.90 crore man-days at the wage rate of Rs. 132 per person. During 2011-2012, 33 crore man-days were generated and the total expenditure was Rs. 3,000 crore. The increase in the number of man-days was in recognition of the State's best performance. As part of the new initiatives,

land development activities, water harvesting structures and plantation would be taken up on lands belonging to SC / ST, small and marginal farmers, IAY (Indira Awaas Yojana) beneficiaries, Below Poverty Line families and families covered under land reforms. Satellite-based maps would be used in the selection of works. All water bodies would be renovated and restored to their original capacity. The Social Audit Unit (SASTA) would be established for conducting social audit in all village panchayats. Social audit would be carried out twice a year. Earlier, initiating the debate, the Minister informed the House that on a pilot basis, payment of wages was being made through banks in 385 village panchayats (one village panchayat per block). Bank accounts had been opened by 94,12,748 MGNREGS workers, accounting for 82 per cent of the total registered workers. The validation of individual bank accounts of MGNREGS workers was being undertaken in all the village panchayats to make payment of wages through banks in the remaining 12,139 village panchayats from 2012-13 in phased manner. The payment of wages by banks through banking correspondents would begin this month in 4,446 village panchayats where banking correspondents were appointed by banks concerned. In 6,837 village panchayats, where the population was between 1,001 and 2,000, payment of wages through banks would commence after May. In those village panchayats, where population was below 1,000, the payment of wages would be done by adopting other alternative methods. (The Hindu 10/4/12)

#### **'Rs 41cr paid to labourers for EGS works' (14)**

BHANDARA: In the year 2011-12, the district administration has paid almost Rs 41 crore to 1.70 lakh labourers working under employment guarantee scheme works. About 41 lakh man-days are created, and 7,610 families completed 100 days on working on EGS sites. Expected expenditure on EGS works including skilled and unskilled component is Rs 76.29 crore, said district collector Pradeep Kalbhor in a chat with TOI on Monday. Kalbhor further said that under EGS, an ambitious programme of planting one crore saplings in the district has gained momentum. Until now, 35 lakh saplings are available in nurseries. A target of 97.90 lakh saplings has been given to various government agencies and till end of this quarter, 96.64 saplings will be available for plantation. Departments of forest, social forestry, Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra, agriculture and rural development department of Zilla Parishad are implementing the ambitious scheme. Work of digging pits for plantation, acquiring polythene bags and seeds is also going on. The ambitious programme of constructing irrigation wells in 541 villages of the district is undertaken under Maharashtra rural employment guarantee scheme. The target to be achieved is 2,705 irrigation wells. "Work on 1,151 wells is in progress while 101 wells are already completed. The remaining will be completed before the commencement of monsoon season," Kalbhor said. The district administration has been given Rs 94.62 crore, out of which Rs 90.28 crore are distributed to various implementing government agencies. Skilled and unskilled works are two components of EGS works. Unskilled work is done by labourers and skilled component is done by machinery and skilled workers like masons. Rs 40.55 crore is given to labourers as their wages for unskilled component and Rs 32.19 crore is given for skilled work. Rs 4.5 crore has been spent on administrative expenses. Still, Rs 18.22 crore are with the administration, which will be utilized for implementation of EGS works to be undertaken in the present financial year. "Instead of going to other works, labourers should opt for working on EGS works. They are assured of their wages and other facilities under EGS act," Kalbhor said. (Times of India 11/4/12)

#### **Government moots tie-up of NREGA, Food Security (14)**

NEW DELHI: The UPA Government is planning to converge its two ambitious schemes—MGNREGA and Food Security Bill in the backdrop of the government's wobbly finance scenario. The Rural Development (RD) Ministry and Food Ministry, which pilot these two ambitious social security schemes, are thinking on the lines of providing food grain as part of NREGA wages. Both are currently working on a proposal to supplement cash payments with food grain—wheat and rice. As per schedule 2 of NREGA Act, "The wages under a scheme may be paid either wholly in cash, or in cash and kind, provided that at least one-fourth of the wages shall be paid in cash only." RD Minister Jairam Ramesh and Food Minister K V Thomas have held discussions and are understood to have agreed in principle. It is learnt that Ramesh mooted the idea as NREGA allocations were reduced in the last budget. "The concept is a very nascent stage. Lots of issues need to be thrashed out," said a government source. He is optimistic, as both ministries are to gain. The Food Ministry too is happy, an official said, as it would help it "get rid" of surplus stock in its godowns; it has nearly 55 million tonnes of grains in the central pool. But not everyone is happy. "The convergence may reduce NREGA to the 1970s' "food for work programme", an RD

Ministry official said. Besides, another official, who played a crucial role in the recent revamp of NREGA, pointed out: "Our experience shows that food grains will find their way to the black market if not monitored." (NIE 13/4/12)

#### **Govt plans rural roads, more NREGS job days (14)**

Kolkata: With an eye on next year's panchayat elections, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee last week announced a monthly stipend of Rs 2,500 for the imams. Now, it is the state Panchayat minister Subrata Mukherjee who is learnt to have underlined his priorities for rural areas. His promises include engagement of private entrepreneurs to submit Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for construction of more roads under PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana). While till February, the department had submitted the DPR for construction of only 29 km of roads (against the target of 2,000 km), it now aims to submit the DPR for 500 km of roads. "There are some faults in the department that we have to eliminate. DPRs are not submitted timely. We could submit DPRs for construction of only 29 km of roads till February. We are planning to engage private entrepreneurs to prepare DPR since the panchayats do not have adequate infrastructure. The existing infrastructure of the panchayats is also weak," a senior panchayat department official said. The department has also set a target to increase job days under MNREGS from the existing 20 to at least 50 days. As of now, MNREGA beneficiaries do not get wages on daily basis. "The department has decided to pay wages on a daily basis. There is a plan to provide job under MNREGA to each one for a stretch of at least seven days," the official said. The "non-performing" panchayats are already facing the heat. "So far, 135 non-performing panchayats, mostly controlled by the Left Front, have been blacklisted." (Indian Express 16/4/12)

#### **NGO slams rural jobs scheme implementation in Assam (14)**

Guwahati, April 19 : A survey of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in Assam has revealed that only about 18 lakh households out of the 43 lakh provided job cards in the state were provided with jobs in 2011-12, an NGO said Thursday. The survey jointly carried out by North East Social Trust (NEST), a Guwahati based NGO, revealed that a total of 43.7 lakh households in Assam are provided with job cards in Assam in the last one year but out of this only 17,98,372 households are able to get jobs under the scheme. "We have taken the help of data provided by the government of Assam regarding implementation of the ambitious act. But the figures show that 58.84 percent people, who were given job cards under the scheme, were not been able to get any job during the last financial year," said Tasaduk Ariful Hussain, executive director of NEST. "This is not all. What is more frustrating is the fact that out of the 43.7 lakh households, only 45,490 (1.04 percent) households were provided with 100 days jobs. Out of those who worked under the MGNREGA, 73 percent households got employment for less than 30 days in the whole year," Hussain added. Giving the detailed statistics, Hussain further revealed that Kokrajhar district could provide highest numbers of 100 days employment by giving employment to 23,216 households while in Dima Hasao (formerly known as North Cachar Hills) district, not even a single house hold could complete 100 days employment. He also noted that no registration has taken place under the scheme in 12 panchayats in Assam last year. "Again in 12 Panchayats under Manikpur and Borobazar in Chirang district, there is no demand for work," he said and added that although Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendras (RGSK) are supposed to be set up under all the panchayats as per the act, only 19 RGSK have been set up so far in Assam. "Although the MGNREGA has made it mandatory to set up RGSKs in each Panchayats with proper facility for vocational training for the job card holders, yet this is largely ignored in Assam," he said. "The MGNREGA is one of the best schemes of the central government particularly for a country like India and it can not only stop the migration from rural areas to urban areas but also fight hunger. Unfortunately, the government has not been able to implement it properly," he claimed. (IANS) (New Kerala 19/4/12)

#### **5 kids among 12 rescued from bonded labour in Chengalpet (14)**

CHENNAI: The Kancheepuram district officials in association with International Justice Mission, an NGO, rescued five children and seven other people who were being held as bonded labourers at a sawing unit in Chengalpet taluk on Friday. Kancheepuram district collector Harish Chhabra told TOI on Saturday that district officials and staff of the NGO raided a sawing unit at Kayar village and rescued 12 people belonging to three families. The NGO had complained to the district officials about the labourers being held hostage. Officials said the labourers were paid 10 a day against the government's minimum wage of 136 per day. The labourers had been in bondage for nearly eight to ten years. They were also not allowed

to mingle with other employees, said officials. Chhabra said the victims were issued release certificates, officially identifying them as victims of bonded labour. They would now be entitled to government rehabilitation funds. The revenue divisional official has also lodged a criminal complaint against the owner of the sawing unit under IPC Sections 9,16,17,18 and 20 of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976, Sections 370, 374 and 341 of the IPC, 1860 and Section 14 of the Child Labour(Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986. They were paid 10 a day as against the government's minimum wage of 136 per day. Officials said the labourers had been in bondage for nearly eight to ten years (Times of India 22/4/12)

#### **Bengal aims at 60 days work under rural jobs scheme (14)**

Lalgarh (West Bengal), April 24 : West Bengal aims to give 60 days of work to each household under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the coming year, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said Tuesday. She said that West Bengal has performed better than the national average in the country in providing rural employment. "In spite of starting from the middle of the year we achieved 33 work days in just seven months which is higher than the national average of 31 work days. Our target is 60 days for the coming year and we are sure we will achieve that," Banerjee said, addressing a rally in this town of West Midnapore. Lalgarh, some 170 km from the state capital Kolkata and a part of Junglemahal - forested areas of West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura where Maoists have a stronghold - Tuesday witnessed Banerjee's first visit after she assumed power in May 2011. Banerjee said the government was committed to its promise of creating employment for the people of the area. "We are working on providing employment to the people of Junglemahal and the process of recruiting 10,000 youths as security personnel has already started. There is nothing to worry for the others; they will be absorbed in other government jobs from time to time," said Banerjee. Congratulating the people of the area for standing up against the Maoists, Banerjee said: "I congratulate you for standing up against them. Those who use guns are cowards. You are the real brave hearts. Do not let the green land of Lalgarh turn red with blood. Do not fall prey to their provocations." Banerjee on the occasion also distributed land pattas, Kisan Credit cards and documents of other governmental welfare schemes. She also promised that all the families of Lalgarh will be given land under her pet project 'Nijo Bhumi Nijo Griha' (own land own house), under which the beneficiary is provided three cottah of land to build his own house. (IANS) (New Kerala 24/4/12)

#### **Minimum wages of workers increased in Delhi (14)**

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Government on Tuesday increased the minimum wages of unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers in Delhi. The monthly minimum wages of unskilled workers has gone up from Rs 6,656 to Rs 7,020, for semi-skilled labour from Rs 7,358 to Rs 7,748 and for skilled labour from Rs 8,112 to 8,528. The new rates will be applicable from April 1 to all 29 scheduled employment categories notified by the government. Labour and industries minister Ramakant Goswami said the rates were revised last in October 2011. The Delhi government has been effecting increase in the minimum wages after adjustment of the average consumer price index number on half yearly basis by addition of dearness allowances in the wages. Labour minister Ramakant Goswami further stated that his department is involved in taking steps in the direction of labour welfare to make the city a role model in this field. Goswami stated that monthly minimum wages of unskilled labour has gone up from Rs 6656 to Rs 7020, in respect of semi-skilled labour from Rs 7358 to Rs 7748 and in respect of skilled labour from Rs 8112 to Rs 8528. As regards clerical and non-technical supervisory staff in all scheduled employments, the minimum wages of non-matriculantes have gone up from Rs.7358 to Rs.7748, in respect of matriculates but not graduates from Rs.8112 to 8528 and in respect of graduates and above from Rs.8814 to Rs.9282. (Times of India 25/4/12)

#### **Fix Rs.10,000 as minimum wage: INTUC (14)**

TIRUCHI, May 1, 2012: The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) has urged the Centre and the State government to fix Rs.10,000 as minimum wage for workers of all categories in tune with soaring prices. The INTUC has also demanded that the annual gratuity term be doubled from the present 15 days to one month and should not be brought under the tax net keeping in mind the welfare of the labourers. It wanted the Centre to bring in necessary changes in the Gratuity Act . Speaking to reporters here on Monday, INTUC, Tamil Nadu branch president G.Kalan said though liberalised environment in the past 20 years had brought in huge foreign investments coupled with industrial developments, the living standards

of a vast majority of workers had not improved. Stating that casual contract system was increasing in private and public sectors besides in multinational companies, Mr.Kalan said workers were being deprived of their due rights including the right to form a trade union. The condition of workers in the unorganised sector was even more dismal as they did not have social security measures such as pension, gratuity and medical assistance, he said. The INTUC along with other central trade unions had staged several protests in support of the rights of the working class and against the policies affecting the labourers. The union would discuss labour-related problems and issues confronting the working class at the 25 State level conference of the state branch of the INTUC that commenced here on Monday with the State executive committee meeting. The three-day event concludes on May 2 when various resolutions would be adopted. Mr.Kalan said Union Shipping Minister G.K.Vasan would inaugurate the conference on May 1 and INTUC president G.Sanjeeva Reddy would deliver a special address in the morning session. Former Minister E.V.K.S.Elangovan would deliver a special address at the public meeting at uzhavar sandhai here. (The Hindu 1/5/12)

#### **Workers resolve to fight for better execution of NREGA (14)**

JAIPUR: Thousands of labourers from various parts of the state assembled at Patia ka chowda grounds in Bhim in Rajsamand district on Tuesday and resolved to fight for better implementation of the Employment Guarantee Act and to campaign for a universal pension act. The labourers gathered for an evening of plays, songs and films dealing with their struggles on the occasion of May Day. They also pledged to fight for strengthening the Right to Information Act, and ensuring legislation on redressal of grievances. The participants said they would also ask the government to stop procurement of seeds from multi-national companies. The gathering was organized by Aruna Roy-led Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, which has been holding a 'mazdoor mela' at the venue for the past 22 years since its inception. The 'mela' provides a platform to labourers to raise, discuss and reflect on issues of concern in an informal and open atmosphere of celebration. "The Centre and the state government are keen on ensuring that the Employment Guarantee Act is removed. The government is trying to destroy the NREGA on the assumption that people do not want to work. The implementation of the Act has been skewed across the country. Even in the better administered areas, there have been major shortcomings in implementation," said Roy while addressing the gathering. "Those seeking their rights have applied, petitioned, and even taken to the streets to seek redressal of their grievances. Industrialists, big landlords, contractors and other private entities do not want NREGA to be a success because it has increased the wages for laborers which obviously is a 'loss' to these entities. In this debate we also want to make it clear that NREGA is not in opposition to the small farmer as he is also a part-time NREGA worker. We believe that NREGA therefore, can actually be designed to be a support structure for the small and middle farmers," she said. The meeting also decided to work towards formation of workers unions to establish the collective voice of the unorganized sector. "Many groups across the country have been working to unionize NREGA workers. This year also, we have decided to focus on formation of unions in different panchayats and blocks. For those of us who have been strong proponents of the NREGA, unionizing of the NREGA workers is a great opportunity to create a powerful movement not just for strengthening the Act, but also for bigger demands such as payment of minimum wages, and "right to work," Roy added. The gathering also saw people visiting the 'School for Democracy', a brainchild of Roy, which would encourage democratic learning by political education. The school is nearing completion. (Times of India 2/5/12)

#### **Beedi workers worst hit by rising prices, says union leader (14)**

MANGALORE, May 3, 2012: The Beedi and Tobacco Union affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress celebrated its 75 anniversary here on Wednesday. The union, which has been established in 1935, has about 1 lakh members. Inaugurating the celebration, AITUC State Committee General Secretary H.V. Anantha Subbarao commended the way the union has been continuing its fight for the rights of the beedi workers. Despite difficulties, the union members had been fighting for the cause of beedi workers, who were concentrated in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, he said. Mr. Subbarao said since 1996 the union had been fighting with the State Government for minimum wages to beedi workers. Recently, the State Government and beedi factory owners agreed for minimum wage of Rs. 116.20. "With our struggle, we (beedi workers) will get wages of 1996. We are yet to come to 2012," he said. Mr. Subbarao said the State Government had not bothered to look at the conditions in which the beedi workers lived. The beedi workers and those working in the unorganised sector had been reeling

under the increase of prices of basic commodities. "The State Government raised questions for the demand of dearness allowance of three paise (per every point increase in consumer point index). But it agrees to pay hefty salaries to Ministers," he said. As many as 40 crore workers in the unorganised sector had not been getting social securities such as Provident Fund, Employees State Insurance, and education support. Mr. Subbarao said the union had placed demand for fixing the minimum wages of workers in unorganised sector at Rs. 10,000. Assistant Labour Commissioner Venkatesh Sindhihatti said Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts had been preferred destination for beedi making as the workers here were highly skilled. (The Hindu 3/5/12)

#### **Domestic workers demand professional recognition (14)**

BANGALORE, May 5, 2012 For thousands of women like her who work as domestic help in households across the State, no excuse is good enough for a day's leave, including running a high fever. As Renuka said, bunking work on a Sunday means a pay cut, as does reporting to work a few minutes late. These were some of the concerns raised at a public meeting held here on Friday, organised by the Joint Action Committee of Domestic Workers. At the meeting, the workers pledged to ask for recognition as a part of which they will appeal to the Labour Commission for their enrolment as domestic workers and also ask for formal contracts for their jobs, which fall under the unorganised sector. Geeta Menon, secretary, Domestic Workers Rights Union, said they also want the government to ratify the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, which provides domestic workers rights and benefits other workers get. She urged the participants to continue to fight for their legal rights so that they may be "respected and judged as valued citizens". Manjula, secretary, of Akhila Karnataka Domestic Workers Trade Union, promised the members to immediately arrange a meeting with the Labour Commission, and get a systematic enrolment in place. (The Hindu 5/5/12)

#### **Construction workers unaware of rights (14)**

HYDERABAD, May 5, 2012: A widow and a migrant construction labourer from Maharashtra, she slogged 14 hours a day to earn Rs. 200 to feed her three children. But on March 24, when she fell off the building that she was working on in Habsiguda and died on the spot, her world came crashing down. Little did the woman know that she was entitled to monetary compensation in case of an injury during construction work, and also that her children would receive an ex gratia if it was fatal. Unfortunately like scores of other labour working in various construction sites dotting the capital and elsewhere in the State, she was simply unaware of the 'Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board' or the welfare schemes attached to it. Five years since the board has been set up, just 10,082 labourers availed the welfare benefits while 14.89 lakh workers were registered. This, while Rs. 789 crore is lying with the Welfare Board for their benefit! That a majority are ignorant about these schemes is clear from the fact that only one labourer received the marriage benefit while families of five labourers obtained the funeral benefits. If this is the plight of the workers registered, one can imagine the condition of those not registered. Not surprisingly, only one unregistered worker got compensation so far. That apart, while voluntary organisations put the number of construction labour in the State at 40 lakh, the Labour Department insists it to be 21 lakh. The department is being blamed for the tardy implementation of the welfare schemes for the construction labour and for the board being near defunct. It begins with the location of labour offices itself. "Many labourers have no knowledge of the offices let alone the welfare schemes. At some places, there is one office for four mandals as in West Godavari district," said Babuji, state secretary, AP Vyavasaya Vruthidharula Union. It was pointed out that while construction activity comprises 38 different works, the board merely recognises a few among them, leaving many workers workers out. As Mr. Babuji explained: "Even agricultural workers turn into construction labourers during off season but they are not considered as construction labour. Board rules specify that anyone working for 90 days a year is a construction worker." Labour Department officials acknowledged these lacunae and said that awareness programme for better registrations and separate board offices for focused implementation is on the anvil, they added. (The Hindu 5/5/12)

#### **'Follow Madhya Pradesh model for worker registration' (14)**

RANCHI: Members of the Bharatiya Janata Majdoor Mahasangh (BJMM) has called upon chief minister Arjun Munda to follow the Madhya Pradesh (MP) model for registration of labourers, considering its efficacy. National president of the association, Prahlad Patel was here on Sunday to sense people's nerves over a couple of issues adopted by the association during its massive congregation at Jantar

Mantar in New Delhi on December 9 last year. Patel, also a former Union minister, stressed that in a country where over 43.4 crore people work as labourers in the unorganized sector, the decision of the Union government to bring mere five sectors - beedi workers, construction workers, tea garden labourers, jute workers and certain contract labourers - under the ambit of the central act of 1996 was inadequate. "The government has listed around 62 sectors under the unorganized sector and we want certain basic facilities to be extended to them too," he said. Patel has all the praises for the MP model. He said the MP government had authorized councillors in urban areas and sarpanch in rural areas to issue labour cards which made the process easy and less cumbersome. He urged the CM to issue labour cards after proper registration of the workers. "Other state governments must follow this and ensure that once a labour card is issued to someone, it is treated as a BPL card and authorizes the holder for other welfare schemes of the government," Patel said. Citing an example of construction workers engaged in commonwealth games who were later denied of their EPF share collectively worth Rs 1,200 crore because of the delay in placing the claim, Patel said every labourer should be enrolled for the EPF scheme. He opined a number of welfare schemes to be introduced for the labourers, including pension scheme of Rs 1,500 per month, inclusion of ESI hospitals and issuance of EPF numbers in addition to Aadhar number. BJMM state president Bharat Yadav promised to take up the issues in future with Munda. Asked if the association had links with the Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh (BMS), Patel said the BMS was a wing of the RSS whereas BJMM was a political wing of the BJP. (Times of India 7/5/12)

#### **Unorganised workers demand pension (14)**

NEW DELHI, May 8, 2012: Demands for a universal pension scheme got bolstered with a large number of underprivileged people including farmers, domestic workers, single women, disabled persons, sex workers and trans-genders from more than 20 States beginning a five-day dharna at Jantar Mantar here on Monday. The campaign for universalisation of Rs.2,000 as monthly pension for every elderly above 60 years in age and does not come under the tax slab is being spearheaded by Aruna Roy of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatan (MKSS) along with Dr. Baba Adhav, the veteran leader of the unorganised workers in Maharashtra. Addressing the protestors, Ms. Roy said: "Pension is a right that the aging working poor have earned by virtue of having given the best years of their lives to contribute to the economy. They have grown food for the country's population, built houses and highways, cleaned streets, collected materials for recycling, cooked food and looked after households and assembled electronic goods." "Society must provide a decent pension for these people when they are no longer able to work. From where do you expect these poor people to pay for every thing, especially when you don't provide them even half the minimum wages?" Ms. Roy asked. At present, all elderly over 60 years from the Below Poverty Lines category get Rs.200 per month as pension under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) with the State governments adding usually lesser and in some cases higher amount to the pension. According to rough estimates there are around two crore beneficiaries of the Government pension scheme against the total elderly population of 10 crore. The Pension Parishad, an assembly of organisations demanding a universal pension scheme, has rejected the IGNOAPS pension calling it "pittance" which can't ensure a dignified living to the elderly. "The Government pension is a pittance which is in no way sufficient for the elderly. That is why we are asking for at least Rs.2,000 or half the minimum wage whichever is higher," said Nikhil Dey, leader of MKSS, who is also part of the Pension Parishad. On the issue of locating money for the scheme, Prabhat Patnaik, former member of the Kerala State Planning Board and member of the UN Commission, said the State has to do the needful. "If a child doesn't get food, you don't blame the child. In the same manner if the elderly starve, it is the State's duty to ensure a dignified living to them who can't be blamed for being poor." Patnaik said that with 14 per cent (Centre and State combined) India has the lowest tax GDP ratio in the world so it has enormous amount of potential to increase taxes. Referring to the Arjun Sengupta Committee which had talked about modest cess increase of 0.5 per cent to generate funds for social welfare schemes, Mr. Patnaik said even if the government increases the tax by 2 more per cent to 16 per cent, India will still be the country with lowest tax GDP ratio and its elderly population will be able to live a decent life as well. During the public hearing, most of the elderly talked about extreme despair and how they felt excluded from all entitlements and services even as they struggling to hold their lives together. Sixty-seven-year-old Ramani Devi doesn't have anyone except a son who has abandoned her in her village in Rajasthan. Now she is left at the mercy of her neighbours. She doesn't get the pension because she doesn't have a BPL card. "Even if I tell you (what I eat to survive), will you never be able to imagine what I eat?" said Ms. Devi when asked how she survives. Now only the hope for a decent pension has brought her to Delhi from the interiors in

Rajasthan. (The Hindu 8/5/12)

#### **NREGA amended, allows 30 new tasks (14)**

New Delhi May 09: Thirty new works have been added to the list of permissible tasks under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, through amendments carried out last week. The amendments while emphasising on works related to watershed based projects, irrigation, poultry and livestock left out actual agricultural labour under NREGA as was proposed earlier. Minister for rural development Jairam Ramesh said the inclusion of labour under System of Rice Intensification or SRI under NREGA has been put on hold as it would be a recurring sort of work and would open a Pandora's box for such works of sugar cane, or wheat or cotton cultivator to be brought under NREGA, he said. (Business Standard 9/5/12)

#### **Separate study on minimum wages for nurses sought (14)**

KOCHI, May 14, 2012: The Qualified Private Medical Practitioners' and Hospitals' Association (QPMPHA) have resolved to ask the government to conduct a separate study on the conditions of small and medium hospitals in the private sector before implementing the recommendations of the Balaraman committee's report on the minimum wages for nurses. This was decided at the panel discussion on 'Issues faced by private hospitals' on the concluding day of the 38th annual conference of the association (QPICON 2012) on Sunday. Small hospitals face a number of problems and the government needs to understand them as well as recognise the contribution made by these hospitals in the health care sector in the State, said N. Madhu, chairman of the organising committee of the conference. Hospitals that have less than 100 beds or up to 50 beds have a different status and many small hospitals are run by a single doctor. While the association advocates minimum wages for nurses, good working conditions for the hospitals are also needed, Dr. Madhu said. There are many issues including harassment by government departments that make it difficult for small hospitals to function properly, he added. If the government fails to see their needs, these small hospitals are likely to close down in the coming years, he said. Only corporate hospitals would be able to provide health care and that would be an extremely costly affair for the common man, Dr. Madhu said. V.D. Sathesan, MLA, inaugurated the function. Former Labour Commissioner Vijaya Kumar, advocates Anil and Benny Thomas were among the panelists, besides Dr. A.K. Sabhapathy, patron of QPMPHA, and other senior doctors. The conference that began on Saturday included a few scientific sessions. Nearly 3,000 hospitals and clinics as well as individual doctors are affiliated to the association, said Dr. Madhu. (The Hindu 14/5/12)

#### **MGNREGS hits farmers hard (14)**

ADILABAD, May 15, 2012: Pro poor it may be but, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has made life difficult for farmers by causing a shortage of agricultural labourers. Ryots in Adilabad want the scheme to be farmer friendly too, without of course, harming the interest of the poor wage seekers. The paucity of labourers has generated a debate within the predominantly cotton growing farming community here on the ways and means to wriggle out of the tricky situation. Some suggestions that have surfaced, like using the MGNREGS itself to tackle the bothersome issue, will be brought to the notice of authorities in near future. The farmers want the government to include work in agriculture fields within the purview of the employment guarantee scheme. This way, the wage seekers will find employment for required number of days and the farmers will be relieved of their problem, they say. With regard to wages to labourers, the farmers suggest the government and the farmer concerned should bear the expenditure equally. This saves money for both the parties without depriving the wage seekers their due, they add. "The 450 strong labour force in our gram panchayat will have more than sufficient work in the over 3,000 acres of fields between January and August. The labourers will get to participate in land preparation until the end of May," assures Kallam Mohan, a former sarpanch of Gimma gram panchayat in Jainad mandal. "Land preparation includes uprooting of residual cotton stems and clearing the fields of small pieces of debris besides exposing the soil to the sun by tilling it," he says. "We have launched an exercise to calculate the employment potential for existing labour force in some of the villages in our mandal. The results will be conveyed to appropriate authority soon," says farmer Paida Devanna of Korta village, of the logical conclusion planned for the exercise. (The Hindu 15/5/12)

#### **Migration leads to scarcity of labour force (14)**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: A non-Malayali waiter takes your order at a restaurant. At the salon, a hair-

dresser from Assam trims your hair. At home, your plumber fails to come home after repeated calls. These are familiar trends that Malayalis have been encountering in the last few years. A survey now nails this change in occupational demography in the state. A large percentage of workforce in the state, which includes plumbers, electricians, hair dresser and cooks, prefer to migrate to greener pastures and work abroad, an occupation-based survey of migrants revealed. Professionals like chemical and IT engineers, nurses topped the list with 57.1% chemical engineers, 54.9 % IT engineers and 51% nurses in the state migrating last year, a study done by Centre for Development Studies (CDS) showed. Waiters, barbers and motor vehicles mechanics in restaurants were not to be left behind. Around 40% waiters, 35.3% barbers 33.8% motor vehicle mechanics, 32 %, 28% lift operators and 33.6% cooks migrated last year. Demographers and migration experts said the huge migration has resulted in a scarcity of labour. "The state has over 5 lakh migrants from states like Assam and West Bengal filling in this demand for skilled labour. This labour scarcity will get worse, as the state unveils infrastructure and port projects in the coming years," says Dr Irudaya Rajan, who along with K C Zachariah of CDS undertook the study. Rajan said migration to the Gulf is still very strong among the youngsters in Kerala . "There is still a glamour element involved in the decision to migrate rather than work in the state, in spite of the depressed economy there," Rajan said. At the bottom of the list were data entry operators and sweepers with 7.1% data entry operators and 1.9% sweepers migrating last year. Journalists and chartered accountants were also somewhere in the bottom of the list with just 14.3% journalists and 16% Chartered accountants migrating abroad. The total remittance in Kerala was Rs 49,695 crore, an increase of Rs 6,407 crore in the last three years. Also, there was a 24% increase in migration in the last 8 years; the unemployment rate dipped from 11.2% to 10.5% in the same period. Amongst the 14 districts in the state, Malappuram received the largest amount of remittances- Rs 9,040 crores -which works out to Rs 1,14,313 per household. "In spite of these overwhelming negative economic trends, migration to the Gulf has not come down. Where young workers are not available for emigration, older workers above 35 are also being substituted. Secondly, the high oil price in recent years is keeping up the demand of workers in the gulf region," he said. (Times of India 16/5/12)

#### **Plea to bring seafood peeling shed workers under rural job scheme (14)**

Kochi, May 17: The Chamber of Kerala Seafood Industry has requested the government to include seafood peeling shed labourers under the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) scheme. The Chamber was of the view that inclusion of peeling shed labourers in the scheme would fill the shortage of labourers in the peeling shed industry. Mr V.P. Hamid, president of the Chamber, said that a majority of the peeling sheds across the State are facing labour shortage and the government initiative in this regard would save the industry, as it is one of the backbones of seafood industry. The labour shortage has forced many of the prawns peeling sheds to close down, affecting various sectors connected with the seafood industry. The Chamber urged the government to take immediate measures to save the industry from further downfall. He said the association has made several representations to both the Centre and the State government to make efforts to save the industry, which brings in at least Rs 11,000 crore foreign exchange annually. When the coir, cashew sectors in the State had faced a downturn, it was the seafood sector that sustained the export market in the state, he said. Mr Hamid pointed out that the peeling sector was doing well in the past two years. With the implementation of MGNREGA scheme in the State, peeling shed workers have started shifting to other jobs under the scheme. He expressed the hope that if the government incorporates the peeling shed workers under the scheme, they will come back to do peeling work. The Chamber also demanded setting up an independent Fisheries Ministry for the benefit of fishing sector in order to provide job protection to thousands of fish workers. It also requested the authorities to extent financial support from MPEFA funds for the renovation of peeling sheds. Mr Hamid said that the Chamber is also planning to submit a memorandum to the Union Minister for Rural Development, Mr Jairam Ramesh, highlighting various demands of the seafood sector. They include protection to fish workers' life and property in the wake of the recent incidents involving merchant ships. (Business Line 17/5/12)

#### **Beedi workers stage dharna, demand revised minimum wages (14)**

Udupi, May 18, 2012: Members of the Udupi District Beedi Workers' Federation, affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), staged a dharna in front of the taluk office demanding final notification of revised minimum wages to beedi workers. Federation general secretary Ramesh Mendon told presspersons that the Government had agreed to revise the minimum wages for beedi workers to Rs.

116.20 for every 1,000 beedis after trilateral talks between the representatives of beedi firm owners, beedi workers, and the Government. Nearly 10 lakh beedi workers in the State were expecting the final notification on the revised minimum wages, which were to come to effect on April 1, 2012. But the Labour Department did not issue the final notification. With the result, the revised minimum wages had not come into force. This was grave injustice to beedi workers. The Labour Department had shown lack of concern to beedi workers. These beedi workers tied beedis, despite the impact they had on their health, just to eke out a livelihood. The Labour Department had been inhuman in dealing with this issue. The department wanted to protect the interests of a few owners of beedi firms by its inaction. The Labour Department should immediately notify the revised minimum wages and make it effective from April 1, Mr. Mendon said. Federation leaders P. Vishwanath Rai, Dogu Suvarna, Vittal Poojary, K. Lakshman, Indira Kukikkatte, Pushpa M., Revathi Majoor, Indira Kaup, and Prema were present. The protestors later submitted a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister at the taluk office. (The Hindu 18/5/12)

#### **Employee insurance scheme not successful: Labour minister (14)**

**GUWAHATI:** At a one-day seminar on Employees' State Insurance Scheme (ESIC), state minister for labour and employment, Prithivi Majhi said the scheme has not very successful in the state as not many people are aware of it. The seminar was held in collaboration with Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) on Friday. Addressing the meeting, the minister said, "We need to create more awareness among people about the scheme as every employee in both the organized and unorganized sector is entitled to benefit from the scheme, which includes full medical care for the workers and their dependants." He added that the insured persons are also entitled to a variety of cash benefits at times of illness and for permanent or temporary disability, resulting in loss of earning capacity. The scheme also provides benefits to insured women and to the families of those employees who die in an industrial accident, he informed. However, the scheme is still not available in places like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Meghalaya and the scheme also doesn't cover the workers of various tea gardens of the state, Majhi said. "The tea gardens do not have proper health care facilities and the workers are not aware of health insurance schemes. We would be happy to bring the tea garden workers under this scheme," he said. A special hospital was also supposed to be constructed for employees under ESIC, but the government has been unable to provide any land till now. "We require around 10 bighas of land for the hospital and we have not been able to get it yet, but we are trying to get the land and as soon as we do so, the work will start," Majhi added. Ganesh Kalita, commissioner of labour, who was also present in the meeting, said, "A vast segment of workers are working in the unorganized sector on contractual basis; health care facility and schemes should also be made available to them." (Times of India 19/5/12)

#### **MGNREGS: central team to make study to include coir sector (14)**

**ALAPPUZHA,** May 19, 2012: Union Minister of State for Power, K.C. Venugopal said that a Central team to study the possibility of including coir sector under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) will reach the State on May 21. Speaking to reporters after chairing a meeting to review the progress of Centrally-sponsored projects in the district here on Saturday, Mr. Venugopal said that the team will visit various places from May 21 to 24. The meeting also recommended to the State Government to fix the work time of MGNREGS from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. A social auditing to review the progress of works under the MGNREGS will be conducted. Kanjikuzhy block panchayat president, D. Priyesh Kumar, Thaneermukkom grama panchayat president, Padmavathiamma, Gandhi Grama Seva Kendram secretary, K.G. Jagadeeshan and officials will be members of a committee to conduct such an audit on the renovation of ponds under the scheme. He said that efforts were on to increase the wages under MGNREGS to Rs 200. Labour budget of Rs 134 crore has been prepared under the scheme for the year 2012-13. The Centre will be urged to increase the contribution of the Indira Awas Yojana, a housing project for BPL families. The lead bank manager has been asked to submit the report on the loan disbursed as per this scheme following complaints that the banks have been asking for collateral, flouting Government norms in this regard, he said. (The Hindu 19/5/12)

#### **NRGEA workers seek more wages (14)**

**SRIKAKULAM,** May 22, 2012: Several workers on Monday registered their protest at the collectorate over the meagre payment for the works being taken up under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The villagers of Oppanigi and other places including outskirts of Srikakulam thronged Srikakulam to meet District Collector G.Venkatram Reddy in the Grievances Cell to explain their woes.

Many of them said each worker was not able to get more than Rs.50 per day though they used to get around Rs.120 per day for the NREGA works. Some of them alleged that the field officers were indulging in corruption causing loss to the workers. Workers of Kurudu village of Kotabommali and Koragam of Burja mandal also made similar allegations. The Collector assured that Project Director of the scheme A.Kalyana Chakravarti would look into their problems and see that they would get remunerative wages for their work. Nava Chaitnya Seva Samiti representatives T.Venkataramana, S.Varadaraju asked the people to provide jobs for the locals to calm down the industrial unrest in the district. Additional Joint Collector P.Rajanikanta Rao and other officials have also listened to the grievances of the people. (The Hindu 22/5/12)

#### **It was the last journey for some migrant labourers (14)**

ANANTAPUR, May 24, 2012: "He wanted to return to farming," says a wailing Parvatamma of the Molagavalli village of the Aluru mandal of Kurnool district who lost her only son, Dandu Suresh, in the train accident. "He started working as a daily labourer after crops failed repeatedly in the last few years," Parvatamma says adding that her son had left his family behind to work as a construction worker in Bangalore so as to run the family in off-season. Similar stories of migrant labourers meeting death came from across the village, which saw four of its children dead on the Hampi Express on Tuesday. Joharapuram Veeresh, Dandu Suresh, Navanepalli and Billa Ranga died in the accident. In many villages of Rayalaseem, a region that perennially suffers from droughts, loss of a family member means a crippling financial blow. "I don't know how I will look after my grandson and granddaughters. He wanted his son to be educated well. Now, he might have to replace his father as bread earner," says Gundamayya, father of Billa Ranga. While MGNREGS is said to have stopped migrations, the same doesn't seem to have applied to Rayalaseema where villagers are herded out by brokers to work in metros as construction labourers. (The Hindu 24/5/12)

#### **Domestic workers in district to have a trade union soon (14)**

COIMBATORE: The Coimbatore District General Workers Union, a wing of the CPM backed CITU, is going to form a union for domestic workers at a convention of house maids to be held in the city today. This comes in the wake of a law enacted by the parliament to protect the interests of housemaids. There are more than 2,000 people registered with the union, working as domestic workers, said A Nelsonbabu, secretary, Coimbatore District General Workers Union. He said, like many other unorganised sectors, domestic workers are facing various issues that need to be resolved. However, many of them including sexual harassment, low salary and payment of salary, go unnoticed. They require a platform, a union or association where they can raise such issues and demand protection from exploitation. Often, domestic workers complain of being denied their wages. Besides, most of them are not entitled to any leave. R Selvi, a domestic worker from the city, said, "It is a welcome move as we don't have any provision for annual salary increment. If we take leave, money is deducted from the salary. We are forced to tolerate the indecent behavior of our employers because we have nowhere else to go," she said. The move comes at a time when there is a shortage of dependable house maids. V Chandran, a resident of Nanjundapuram, said that forming a union is a good step in promoting the interests of house maids. But it is important that they are reliable and do their job well. Arjun, a resident of Kovaipudur feels that domestic workers are unreliable. They take leave without informing employers. He says they have every right to start a union to protect their interests, provided they are committed in their work as well. Domestic workers are facing various issues, including sexual harassment, low salary and payment of salary. But many of them go unnoticed.(Times of India 28/5/12)

#### **MNREGA contractual workers can be transferred (14)**

Contractual workers employed under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme can now be transferred A policy has been announced for transfers of MNREGA contractual workers in the state. Principal Secretary Panchayats & Rural Development has issued an order to this effect. Transfers can be made on both voluntary and administrative levels. Transfers will be effected from June 1 to 30. Applications for transfers received upto May 30 will be considered. Transfers of contractual workers will be made on the basis of availability of vacant posts, requirement of workload and requirement of contractual posts under the scheme, availability of funds under administrative head and filling of posts of this and other equivalent posts in division/district and status of vacant posts. In voluntary transfer cases, applications of a couple in government service or on contractual basis for posting at the same place or

district, posting at a place in the wake of situations arising out of his or her or dependent's serious illness and mutual transfers can be considered. Workers employed under MNREGA can also be transferred on administrative basis. Transfers outside district to be made with state-level approval State level decision and approval will be required for all the transfers from district or division to another district or division. For this, Madhya Pradesh Employment Guarantee Council has been made the nodal agency. District Collector will be the competent authority in both administrative and voluntary transfers within a district. The collector will order transfers under both categories within the district after ensuring compliance of all the provisions under the policy. (Central Chronicle 28/5/12)

#### **Is MSP for 13 minor forest produce the next MGNREGS? (14)**

NEW DELHI, June 1, 2012: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA)'s plan to introduce a Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism for 13 items of minor forest produce (MFP) has been approved by the Planning Commission. Sources in the Ministry told The Hindu that a detailed financial proposal would be sent to the Expenditure Finance Committee of the Finance Ministry by June 7 after which it would go to the Cabinet. Union Minister Kishore Chandra Deo, who is piloting the scheme, would like a MSP Commission to be set up by January 2013, the sources said. The plan to introduce MSP for minor forest produce is being described in government circles as the next MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) as it has the potential to transform the lives of 100 million forest dwellers, a majority of whom are tribals and whose livelihoods depend on the collection and marketing of MFPs. The proposal, the sources said, had reached this stage after a great deal of resistance from sections of the bureaucracy, especially those in the Forest Departments of various States, and after two committees, one headed by agricultural economist T. Haque and another by Planning Commission member-secretary Sudha Pillai, gave their reports on the issue. MFP have significant social and economic value for tribal communities as they not only provide essential food, medicines and other consumption items but also cash income. The estimated value of the 13 major MFPs at the first purchase point is worth about Rs. 3600 crore annually, of which tendu and bamboo alone account for Rs. 2000 crore, according to the Haque Report. The MFPs that will be covered by the scheme will be tendu, bamboo, mahua flower, mahua seeds, sal leaves, sal seeds, lac, chironji, wild honey, myrobalan, tamarind, gums and karanj. The scheme, a Ministry document says, will help provide better prices to the MFP gatherers, who now receive a pittance, exploited as they are by local traders and other vested interests; it will also ensure sustainable harvesting of MFPs. The proposed MFP Commission will be an autonomous body under the MoTA. The scheme envisages undertaking procurement and marketing operations at pre-fixed MSP for selected MFP by designated State agencies and providing financial assistance to the States for these operations and subsidies if necessary. The Commission will link the MSP to minimum wages paid under the NREGS, transportation cost for the tribals to push the produce in the market, value addition to the produce and local market prices. The MSP of each item would be reviewed annually. The MoTA, the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India and State institutions will be strengthened suitably to implement the scheme. (The Hindu 1/6/12)

#### **Congress mulls consolidation, banks on MNREGS, census (14)**

LUCKNOW: Consolidation seems to be the buzz word within the Congress party these days. After putting a dismal show in the 2012 Uttar Pradesh assembly election, where it bagged 28 seats, party leaders are now looking ahead to put up a better show in the coming 2014 general elections. Pushing the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme as a tool to engage with the rural poor, party leader Sanjay Dixit, who is also a member of the Central Employment Guarantee Council (CEGC) has shot off a letter to all district and block chiefs of the local NREGS cells, exhorting them to ensure the ongoing socio-economic and caste census in Uttar Pradesh is carried out effectively. Using the 'Gandhi' card to motivate the party cadres, Dixit has also said that participating in the exercise will be tantamount to Sonia and Rahul Gandhi seeing their efforts to help the poorest of poor in the country. The enumeration exercise, which was formally kicked off by the state government at the beginning of the month will attempt to clean up the anomalies in the existing BPL list in UP. At the same time, the exercise, if capitalised well, can also be a game changer for the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Dixit said, "The Centre's flagship NREGS is a powerful tool that allows us to connect with the poorest of poor. If the grass-root level Congress worker can be present at a time when the BPL list is being revisited, it will serve as a relationship-building exercise between us and the masses. As a result, I have written to all NREGS district

and block chairpersons to take up this work seriously." In a three-page letter to the party's district and block-level members, Dixit has shared the details of the enumeration process, laying emphasis on the need to ensure that all those persons, whose names were erroneously left out during the previous BPL survey in 2002, be included in the state's list after the present enumeration exercise. "It is our duty to ensure that the enumeration of poor families is done correctly and that all necessary information is entered correctly into the hand-held devices carried by the enumerators," Dixit has written. Anomalies in distributing job cards to the poor was among the key campaign issues raised by Rahul Gandhi during UP's assembly election earlier this year. This time, with the lists being revisited across the country, the enumeration exercise offers an opportunity to the Congress to strengthen its cadre, especially in UP. Through the socio-economic and caste census, the state government will cover all of UP's 20.59 crore persons, spread across 3,95,268 enumeration blocks. The main objective of the exercise is to rank households on their socio-economic status, which will then be the basis for the identification of households living below the poverty line. Though the socio-economic and caste census went through inordinate delays during the former BSP regime, the enumeration exercise is now expected to be complete by September, while the final uploading and printing will only be done by February 2013. (Times of India 5/6/12)

#### **CITU plans countrywide campaigns (14)**

COIMBATORE, June 6, 2012: Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) will soon organise country-wide campaigns against the anti-labour and neoliberal policies of the Union and State governments. Sharing the details of the decisions taken at the All India General Council of CITU meeting in Coimbatore, A.K. Padmanabhan, president, and Tapan Sen, general secretary, said that the campaign would be from July 2 to 8. During the campaign period, the workers would raise issues related to price rise, contract system of employment prevailing in all sectors, the demand for equal wage for equal work, minimum wages of at least Rs. 10,000 a month among others. The leaders also said that general council reviewed the February 28 general strike and decided to continue the joint struggles against the policies of the government as the Union Government had failed to look into the demands raised by the unions during the last three years. CITU along with other central trade unions and national federations would go for country-wide campaigns and struggles culminating in a country-wide strike for days and it would decide on this after taking to the central trade unions. The leaders said that CITU would also organise a massive mobilisation of workers in various Government of India schemes to demand regularisation of employment with proper wages and social security benefits. Prior to the massive mobilisation in front of Parliament, CITU would organise state-level campaigns. The trade union would also organise a country-wide strike on November 6 to focus on problems faced by construction workers. Then they would also highlight issues faced by other unorganised sector workers like minimum wages, social security benefits, welfare boards, etc. Other issues that the CITU would take up included solidarity actions to support workers in public sector undertakings, who were fighting against privatisations, movements and campaigns on issues of social and gender oppressions, etc. The general council had also decided to conduct its 14th National Conference by May 2013 and would be preceded by state conferences. (The Hindu 6/6/12)

#### **'NREGS should serve purpose' (14)**

VIJAYAWADA, June 9, 2012: Though providing employment was the prime objective of the scheme, care should be taken to see that the works taken up under the scheme were of use to the people. The works taken up under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should contribute to nation building along with providing employment to the poor and under employed, district Collector S.A.M. Rizvi has said. Addressing Mandal Development Officers at a review meeting here on Friday the Collector said that the Government was spending crores of rupees on the rural employment guarantee scheme. Though providing employment was the prime objective of the scheme, care should be taken to see that the works taken up under the scheme were of use to the people. He said that permission was granted for the improvement of 543 minor drains in 27 of the 50 mandals in the District under the scheme. He said that work had already been completed on 221 drains and work was in progress in 108 drains and it had been recently grounded in 32 drains. Reviewing the progress of the meeting the Collector said that employment guarantee scheme works in Pedana, Gudlavaluru, Challapalli, Mudinepalli, Pamarru, Mopidevi, Pamidemakkala, Vuyyuru, Kalidindi and Kodur mandals were progressing fast, but some effort should be made to speed it up in the remaining mandals. While the improvement of 434 tanks was on the cards work had begun in 139 tanks only. Levelling of the ground in the Indiramma Housing Colony also needed

to be expedited, he opined. While levelling was needed in 129 colonies work had been completed in just six colonies and it was in progress in another 34 only, the Collector pointed out. The drainage works should be completed on a priority. (The Hindu 9/6/12)

#### **Stalled growth showing in jobless numbers now (14)**

New Delhi: The sustained hammering down of GDP growth numbers every passing quarter is beginning to show up on employment numbers, with subdued business sentiment forcing a fresh wave of lay-offs. Those in the firing line include wage-earners in both formal and informal sectors, along with those holding white collar jobs across the service and manufacturing sectors. The job crunch is clearly evident in labour-intensive industries such as textiles, the country's largest employer after agriculture. A total of 123 cotton and man-made fibre textile mills in the organised sector, that employed 44,681 workers, are estimated to have closed down in the past three years. If the mills in the SSI sector were included, the number would be higher. Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra top the list of states where most organised-sector mills have closed down. The sector has been hit by a sharp fall in cotton yarn prices and poor domestic and global demand. The problem is compounded by the economic crisis in the US and Europe, as these alone account for 65 per cent of the country's textile exports. Industry organisation Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) estimates that job losses over the past three years are much higher than government estimates, at about 45 lakh persons. According to AEPC Chairman A Sakthivel, domestic banks are sending out closure notices and this is hurting small units the most because of credit problem. Data compiled for a crisis-management meeting late last month, held just ahead of the May 29 meeting of Textile Minister Anand Sharma with Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee on restructuring of Rs 35,000-crore worth of bank loans for the textile industry, shows that the larger mills forced to down shutters include Ahmedabad-based Asoka Cotsyn of Arvind Mills, which had 904 workers on its rolls, and a unit of Maneklal Harilal Mills in Ahmedabad, with 1,615 workers. (Indian Express 10/6/12)

#### **Construction workers seek better social security (14)**

Tirupur, June 11, 2012: The district-level conference of CITU-affiliated Tirupur District Construction Workers Federation held here on Sunday has passed a resolution seeking better social security and reiterated the need to improve the functioning of the welfare board for them in the State. The construction workers raised the concern that they were not getting many of the social and financial assistances which their counterparts in Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura had been given by the respective State governments through the welfare boards there. "The welfare board for construction workers in Kerala is extending medical assistances as well as loan for building dwellings to its registered members whereas these facilities are non-existent in Tamil Nadu," D. Kumar, secretary of the Federation, pointed out. Likewise, the construction workers in the State were yet to be brought under the Provident Fund scheme even though the respective welfare boards in Tripura and West Bengal had managed to introduce the scheme for its members. The general complaint from the construction workers was that the functioning of the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board had been far from satisfactory. "The disbursal of financial assistances under the existing schemes itself has been tardy on many a times. Besides this, the Board has generally not been sympathetic to the grievances of the workers pertaining to improvement of social security," they pointed out. The workers had been asking for extension of education assistances to their children who wanted to pursue teacher's training and nursing courses as well as higher education through correspondence mode, and increase in the scale of assistance given to conduct marriages of their children. Pension for all women workers who attained the age of 50 years was another main requisition of the construction workers which was yet to be addressed. "These are all reasonable demands considering the steep escalation in the overall cost of living during the last few years. However, our demands are not taken up favourably despite briefing the authorities concerned of the predicament of workers in the sector," they said. The Federation was of the view that the welfare board in the State should be brought under Central Act so that kin of workers who died in harness could get solatium at higher slabs. (The Hindu 11/6/12)

#### **5-star hotel, The Grand deprives worker of wages (14)**

New Delhi: A self-employed contractual worker engaged in a legal battle with a firm owning five-star hotel, The Grand here to get his dues for the construction he carried out in 2009, has finally been paid his wages after he secured a decree from a Delhi court for it. The Grand owner Unison Hotels Ltd paid a sum of Rs 43,936 after a civil court issued a decree, ordering the firm to pay the worker his dues. Shrikant

Choudhary, engaged in construction work on contractual basis, had filed a civil suit through advocate Sudhir Sampath against the Unison Hotels Ltd and its managing director for recovery of Rs 40,908. "In the aforesaid facts and circumstances, the suit is decreed in favour of plaintiff (worker) and against defendant number one (Unison Hotels Ltd) in the sum of Rs 40,908 with pendente lite (since litigation is pending) interest at the rate of nine percent per annum from the date of institution of the suit till the date of decree and future interest at the rate of six percent per annum from the date of decree till realisation," Civil Judge Ashish Aggarwal said. Choudhary had pleaded that he was awarded contractual work by the firm on two occasions on January 10, 2009 and August 25, 2009 on an agreements that he would be paid Rs 45,750 and Rs 5,373 respectively for the two contracts. After completion of work, the hotel "failed to pay him for the said services" and on his insistence for the same, the company reduced his bill amount for first contract from Rs 45,750 to Rs 35,535. "Yet, the defendants failed to make payment of the sum due to the plaintiff," Chaudhary said stating reasons to file the suit. The court had issued summons to the defendants but they "failed to appear before the court" and they were proceeded ex parte. Chaudhary produced the contract deeds, and bills of the said work before the court to prove his case. The court allowing his plea issued a decree against Unison Hotels and said 'The Grand' hotel and Unison's MD was not liable for the contract. (The Hindu 12/6/12)

#### **Domestic workers demand basic rights (14)**

New Delhi, June 16, 2012, DHNS: Observing International Domestic Workers Day on Saturday, domestic workers in Delhi held a rally demanding access to basic rights. More than 100 domestic workers in Delhi participated in this rally shouting slogans which stressed better working conditions, better wages and getting a day off in a week. "Through the rally, the plight of the domestic workers was brought to the forefront in addition to delving into the importance of affirmative action for their successful upliftment," said Namita Malik, member of Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). Domestic workers alleged that they are not paid well and not given any days off during the week. "If we ask our employers to increase our salaries or give us one off in every seven days they become rude and nasty with us," said a worker. On June 16 2011, the International Labour Organisation adopted a set of international standards aimed at improving the working conditions for domestic workers across the world. These standards defined certain aspects such as who is a domestic labourer, their minimum age and wage, the terms of employment, requirements for migrant workers and the need to register with placement agencies. However, domestic workers allege that none of this seems to have been fulfilled in Delhi as yet. (Deccan Herald 16/6/12)

#### **Insurance cover of 23 lakh landless poor under threat (14)**

HYDERABAD: Close to 23 lakh landless poor in the State enrolled in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and covered under the Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana (group insurance scheme) stand to lose their insurance cover following the Centre's directive that administrative cost should not exceed six per cent of the annual budget. The directive to the State government recently has landed the Rural Development Department in a quandary as it could not pay the premium for the 13 lakh renewals and 10 lakh new enrolments done this year. The policies were to be renewed by the Life Insurance Corporation from April while the fresh ones would have come into effect from June this year.

A.P. pioneer Andhra Pradesh had pioneered the group insurance coverage for the self-help group members as well as rural landless poor. Coverage of NREGS workers under the insurance scheme since the last two years has been hailed as excellent work by the Centre itself. The issue cropped at a video conference held by the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) on June 15, when District Rural Development Agency officials from the districts brought to light the non-payment of insurance claims by Life Insurance Corporation. According to official sources, Rural Development Department paid the annual premium amount of Rs. 100 for each individual under scheme and collected Rs. 15 as service charge from the beneficiaries. The DRDA personnel at the district level had collected the service charge for the renewals as well as fresh enrolment and issued valid receipts. Due to the Centre's clause, the Rural Development Department is unable to release the funds towards the premium. A fall out of the delay in paying premium has resulted in some beneficiaries, who died since April, not getting the insurance claims. According to figures available with the Rural Development Department on an average 900 deaths are reported for every one-lakh insured persons annually. Each insured person is eligible for Rs. 30,000 if it is a natural death while accidental death ensured Rs. 75,000. A sum of Rs. 45 crore has been paid as insurance claims for the deaths reported to the Call Centre's run by the District Rural Development

Agency at the district. (The Hindu 18/6/12)

#### **Focus on issues faced by domestic workers (14)**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The next State Plan will allocate funds to set up a welfare fund board for domestic workers, State Planning Board Member C.P. John said here on Monday. Speaking at a one-day workshop organised in connection with the State-level observance of International Domestic Workers' Day, Mr. John said the Planning Board would address the social, financial, and labour issues faced by domestic workers in the Economic Review 2012. "Constitution of a welfare fund board will be a major step towards addressing the labour issues of workers in this unorganised sector. If the non-governmental organisations and unions working in this sector present a project proposal it can be definitely taken up by the Planning Board," he said. Minister for the Welfare of Scheduled Tribes and Youth Affairs P.K. Jayalakshmi inaugurated the workshop jointly organised by the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Self Employed Women's Association, and Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS). Ms. Jayalakshmi said the problems faced by domestic workers, especially those working in foreign countries, needed to be addressed. "Domestic workers were like labourers in any other sector. Their rights need to be protected by law. The first step towards this is initiating a public discussion on the issues faced by domestic workers," Ms. Jayalakshmi said. INTUC State president R. Chandrashekhara, who presided over the function, said the Union and State governments should jointly formulate projects for the welfare of domestic workers. SEWA Union State secretary Sonia George said the Government of India had recently taken positive steps towards recognising the labour rights of domestic workers. This included the signing of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) convention 'Decent work for domestic workers' and the inclusion of domestic workers in the Anti Sexual Harassment Bill. The Union government had constituted a task force to formulate a policy on domestic workers' welfare. Defining the workplace and working environment of domestic workers was the biggest challenge in the formulation of a legal framework to protect such workers, Ms. George said. "The fact that domestic workers work in other people's houses itself makes the issue complex as homes are conventionally considered as private spaces. Bringing the house environment under the ambit of a legal framework is the most challenging issue. The task force is working towards bringing benefits enjoyed by workers in other sectors to domestic workers. This includes benefits like pension, sick leave, and maternity leave," she said. State Labour Commissioner T.T. Antony, Additional Secretary (Labour) B. Babu, National Policy for Domestic Workers task force member Nalini Nayak, CITU general secretary M.M. Lawrence, and HMS State president M.K. Kannan took part in the workshop. (The Hindu 19/6/12)

#### **NDMC may evict 3,000 vendors at India Gate (14)**

New Delhi: India Gate, a proud symbol of the capital that attracts visitors in droves, has been a source of livelihood for vendors selling everything from knick-knacks to food and drink. The place is at once a picnic spot and a walkers' paradise on pleasant evenings. This popular rendezvous may turn into history if the city's civic body goes ahead with its plan to evict around 3,000 vendors from the India Gate stretch. According to the vendors, the city police have been asking them to leave since the first week of June. They had been set a deadline - June 20, that is today. "The police claim the Lieutenant Governor's office has notified them that the India Gate has become a garbage dump due to littering and lack of waste disposal system. When we ask them to show us the notice, they refuse," said a vendor. According to National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI), although there are certain areas in and around Connaught Place (CP) which have been declared as no vending zones by the Supreme Court, the India Gate stretch is a regulated vending zone. "We got to know that the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has suddenly decided to declare this stretch also as no vending zone. As per SC guidelines, this area is a regulated vending zone where stop gap arrangements should be made in roundabouts and other sensitive areas and vendors should not be allowed only there," said Ranjit Abhigyan, program manager, NASVI. The vendors feel that a sudden order of eviction will be a blow to their livelihood as they don't belong to any established market. "It is not our responsibility to keep the place clean. We make sure that we keep dustbins near our carts. If visitors are littering the place, why should we be blamed," asked another vendor. The vendors say an eviction drive of this magnitude has never happened before. "The cops occasionally used to ask some vendors to leave; when those vendors gave them more money, they were allowed to stay. These days we have to pay anywhere between Rs 1000-3000 to the police," said a vendor. In 2007, many of these vendors applied for licences but only 45 got licences. Now, NASVI has submitted a memorandum urging the intervention of Urban Development Minister Kamal Nath and

Minister for Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation Kumari Selja. (Deccan Herald 20/6/12)

#### **Govt to audit Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme works (14)**

NAGPUR: In view of several complaints of massive irregularities in Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) works, the state has decided to audit them on the lines Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). If the audit is done properly, many senior government officers will be exposed. Chartered accountants (CAs) will be hired on contract for account related management services (ARMS). The government has already started updating EGS related data for the audit. The audit of Maharashtra National Rural EGS (MNREGS) will be done from gram panchayat level every year. The fee of CAs will be paid from the 6% amount reserved in EGS works for administrative expenses and hence the government will not incur extra expenditure. Dr Madhavi Khode, MNREGS commissioner, said that till now the quality of EGS works was examined. Now audit would be done to improve the quality of works. "We hope that there will be no complaints from the beneficiaries once this exercise starts. Government money will be properly used." Meanwhile, an atmosphere of anxiety prevailed in the district collectorate on Wednesday due to the inquiry ordered against senior revenue officers. Divisional commissioner BV Gopala Reddy has ordered an inquiry against resident deputy collector (RDC) Pramod Bhusari and three other deputy collectors Prakash Sharma, Sunil Padole and Dilip Sawarkar for their alleged involvement in EGS scam. Ten officials were suspended in this connection but no action was taken against the remaining twelve. Ram Joshi, incumbent deputy collector (EGS), said that social forestry department would conduct its own inquiry. The district collectorate and divisional commissionerate would also conduct separate inquiries. All the three reports would then be submitted to the divisional commissioner. Joshi said that Darade had in his report not charged the twelve officers with any financial irregularities. "The inquiry officer will investigate whether there any administrative irregularities were committed by these officials." He further said that the inquiry officer would have to go to Umred and Bhiwapur (the works in question were done in these talukas) to go through the documents. "The volume is so much that we will have to hire a truck to bring them to Nagpur." On whether explanation from accused revenue officials had been sought, he said, "The inquiry officer will first find out whether any administrative irregularities had been committed by an officer. If there is prima facie evidence against an officer only then he can seek an explanation." The deputy collector also said that the irregularities were to the tune of Rs two crore and not around Rs four crore. When asked as to when an inquiry officer would be appointed, he said that it would be decided by senior officers. (Times of India 21/6/12)

#### **Saudi law helps enslave workers: Report (14)**

Hyderabad: The US State Department's annual report on human trafficking 2012 has stated that illiterate and unskilled labourers from countries like India "are subjected to forced labour and to a lesser extent, forced prostitution" in Saudi Arabia. Thousands of men and women from India and other countries voluntarily travel to Saudi Arabia to work as domestic servants or other low-skilled labourers. Some of them subsequently "face conditions indicative of involuntary servitude, including non-payment of wages, long working hours without rest, deprivation of food, threats, physical or sexual abuse and restrictions on movement such as withholding of passports or confinement to the workplace", the report states. Saudi Arabia has one of the largest contingents of Indian migrant workers in the Arabian Gulf, a considerable number of which is from Andhra Pradesh. Women domestic workers go to the Gulf mainly from cities like Hyderabad, which is notorious for minor girl child marriages with elderly Arab nationals. (Asian Age 25/6/12)

#### **Facilities demanded for freed bonded labourers (14)**

Shidlaghatta,: The Jeeta Vimukti Karnataka Sangha staged a protest outside the Taluk Panchayat office on Friday, demanding housing and employment guarantees for freed bonded labourers. They alleged that bonded labourers, on being freed, are given only temporary compensation and are deprived of a pension and other basic facilities from the Government. Even construction works falling under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) have used contract workers, depriving daily-wage labourers, including recently-freed bonded labourers, of their livelihood. Almost all of the freed bonded labourers belong to the Scheduled Castes. At taluk and district-level meetings, governmental officers were directed to give them preference when it came to loans, which in turn could help emancipated bonded labourers, get back on their feet. But despite these rulings, officers have been reluctant to provide any services, protestors said. Those labourers who have been 'officially compensated'

have been given just Rs 1,000 - as in the case of 19 freed labourers in 2010-11 and two in 2012. Protestors have called for Rs 19,000 to be made available for rehabilitation and another Rs 30,000 for employment, under the Swarnajayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana, and ration cards under the Antyodaya Scheme. In addition, protestors want freed labourers interested in agricultural work to be given 100 days of employment under the MGNREGS scheme. Demands also include five acres of land for each freed labourer from the Ambedkar Development Corporation and assistance for women through Self-Help Groups run by the Jeevika. Activists submitted a memorandum to Dr Vijay Prakash, Executive Officer of the taluk office regarding the demands. Vijay Prakash said that the issue will be discussed at the Gram Panchayat meeting and promised to give labourers all facilities possible. (Deccan Herald 1/7/12)

#### **MP in list of top 10 states in MNREGA implementation (14)**

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh is performing well in MNREGA implementation and is in the top 10 list of states in five categories, as per the Union government's quarterly delivery monitoring unit (DMU) report. Besides providing maximum employment to villagers with implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), the state has also created permanent sources of livelihood, the DMU report released by the state government here today said. Payment of Rs 120 per day is being made to labourers while wages are being paid depending on the quantum of work. The DMU report is prepared on the basis of quarterly review of the Planning Commission of India. As per the report for January-March this year, Madhya Pradesh retained its place in top-10 states in five of seven categories. The state stands third in total expenditure under MNREGA, fifth in generating man-days and number of families completing 100-day labour, sixth in making employment available to families and tenth in generation of scheduled caste man-days. According to monthly information system report of the Union government, employment has been made available under MNREGA by generating 94.31 lakh man-days. As many as 4.89 lakh families were benefited, including 27 per cent STs, 20 per cent SCs and 42 per cent women. It has been mentioned in the survey, conducted by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Indore, that the implementation of the scheme has curtailed migration of people from villages. According to the survey, 65 per cent villagers have admitted that their income has increased due to MNREGA and life has become prosperous. They informed that their income has gone up to 24 per cent while 88 percent villagers lauded MNREGA's role in creation of permanent assets in villages. MNREGA has also increased agriculture production and villagers have been able to change crop pattern. (Zee News 2/7/12)

#### **Govt failing to provide jobs under MGNREGA: Activists (14)**

JAIPUR: The state government appears to be failing in providing job to rural workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). If the NGOs keeping a watch on the execution of the MGNREGA are to be believed, this is the major reason why the state government has checked the availability of Form-6, which is required for seeking job under the Act. The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) has alleged that the government was failing to provide the jobs and to avoid paying unemployment allowances to such job seekers; it was deliberately checking the availability of Form-6 in rural areas. "Form-6 works as a receipt with the rural workers to show that they have sought job from the government under the Act. When the government fails to provide a job within 15 days, these workers are entitled to unemployment allowances and the local authorities can be fined," MKSS's Shankar Singh said on Monday. "By not making these forms easily available, the government is actually not leaving any proof with the job seekers. This is being done to simply avoid paying allowances and fines," Singh added. Singh and several other social activists led by Aruna Roy met chief secretary CK Mathew on Monday to discuss the 'problem areas' of MNREGA in Rajasthan. "We have asked the chief secretary to make the Form-6 available with the panchayat ward members and at the government schools too. At present, the forms are available with the panchayat and its sarpanch and the gram sevaks," Roy later told reporters. She added, "The government expenditure and the number of people getting jobs under MGNREGA have come down in Rajasthan in recent years. People here are not getting the 100 days of job, which is their constitutional right." The state government's latest figures show that the number of families with MGNREGS job-cards has gone up from 89.28 lakh in 2009-10 to 96.01 lakh in 2012-13, while the number of families getting 100 days of work has declined from 17.63 lakh in 2009-10 to 0.01 lakh in 2012-13. Another team member, Moti Lal from Baran, said the number of people who sought jobs under the scheme in his district increased drastically once the Form-6 was made available. "After the state government provided training to ward members of five blocks in Baran district, the number of job seekers increased four-folds," he said. (Times of India 3/7/12)

### **Saving the MGNREGS will head NAC's agenda (14)**

New Delhi: Saving the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) — the centrepiece of UPA-I's achievements in the social welfare sector — from its many critics in government and the media who view it as a drain on the exchequer will head the Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council (NAC)'s agenda in the coming months. At a meeting of the reconstituted NAC on Friday, its members discussed the role a re-energised MGNREGS could play in alleviating the condition of the very poor, currently facing the threat of a failed monsoon and an impending drought: in this context, it was felt that there was a critical need for public works may arise in many States. The NAC Working Group on Transparency, Accountability and Governance, headed by Aruna Roy, has, therefore, been mandated to hold consultations in co-ordination with the Ministry of Rural Development and the State governments "to measure the impact of the Act so far, monitor implementation of the scheme and suggest effective institutional measures." Also attending the meeting for the first time in his capacity as a NAC member was the Planning Commission's Mihir Shah, author of a report of the Ministry of Rural Development that has examined the challenges to the MGNREGS, following which the Ministry issued fresh guidelines and set up a National Resource Group and Technical Advisory Group to look into issues of implementation. Ms. Roy submitted a letter to Ms. Gandhi, pointing out that after an initial period of enthusiasm and significant progress, the MGNREGS was facing several challenges in basic implementation. Simultaneously, despite its seminal achievements, it was at the receiving end of a series of hostile critiques, not based on rigorous evaluation. Ms. Roy said it was crucial to interface with workers on issues such as work on demand; wages and timely payments; expanding the scope of works, ensuring better quality assets; transparency, accountability and social audit. "It requires very strong commitment and signals from the highest levels of authority to see that the basic rights under the MGNREGS are actualised," Ms. Roy wrote, stressing, "New guidelines should be operationalised, but we do need to go beyond that. The implementation of these guidelines has to be monitored consistently, and action taken where there are loopholes and deliberate mismanagement." The second key issue the NAC deliberated on was how to make the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 as inclusive as possible with a comprehensive social security package to be provided through a single window backed by a common ICT architecture. On Friday, representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and Department of Financial services (Ministry of Finance) made a presentation to the Council in the context of the NAC's recommendations that were sent to them in April 2012.... (The Hindu 7/7/12)

### **New action plan to protect workers' rights (14)**

HYDERABAD, July 9, 2012: The Labour Department has formulated a new action plan that compels officials of all ranks to conduct regular inspection on factories, industries and other industries across the State, to protect workers' rights. The new plan has come in the wake of establishments throughout the State flouting labour laws to exploit workers, in the near absence of any inspections by the department for over a decade now. Barely any checks - to ensure payment of minimum wages, bonus, compensation, prohibition of child labour, implementation of working hours and weekly holidays, among others - were being conducted, said Labour Department officials. "Officers have been conducting inspections only under exceptional cases for at least 10 years now. This has led to a situation where employers have been exploiting their workers with impunity," said officials. To remedy this situation and protect interests of workers, the new action plan imposes monthly targets for inspection to be undertaken by labour officials, from July onwards. While frequent checks were being carried out until 2001, a Government Order (GO.Ms.No 40) to 'systematise and rationalise inspection procedure' was issued, based on employers complaints of 'harassment' by officials during inspections. "The GO mandated that an inspector give prior notice to an employer before conducting an inspection. Noting that such a provision invalidated the very purpose of inspection, the GO was cancelled and replaced with another order (GO.Ms.No 33)," informed officials. The new order restored officer's rights to conduct inspections on establishments within their jurisdiction without any targets. Yet, inspections were conducted very rarely, causing numerous misdemeanours of employers to go unnoticed, officials said. The new action plan to be enforced from July 2012 to 2013, however, imposes targets on officers of all ranks from Joint Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners to Assistant Commissioners in the State, to keep a thorough check on employers. While the newly imposed targets mandate nearly three lakh inspections in one year across the State, merely 1 lakh inspections had been recorded last year. "Even this number is because one inspection was

registered multiple times under different acts. This is no longer being allowed under the new plan," officials said. Implementation of 26 labour acts like the Payment of Bonus Act, Equal remuneration Act, Minimum Wages Act, Workmen's Compensation Act, Industrial Employment (Standing Orders Act) and Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act among others will be inspected during the course of the inspections. (The Hindu 9/7/12)

#### **Unorganised sector not in sound health (14)**

HYDERABAD: Workers in the leather and tanning industry in the State capital are exposed to chemicals, animal wastes and decomposing offal for long hours. A majority of welders do not know the exact kind of glass they need to use while welding. Eventually, they lose sight or have serious eye-related disorders. Workers in bangles and glass factories in Hyderabad are exposed toxic fumes leading to respiratory disorders and tuberculosis. The common thread that binds them all is that such workers belong to the unorganised sector and have no access to occupational health cover or services. A slew of programmes are slated to be held on Monday to mark National Occupational Health Day. The irony is that many such programmes are being held by companies and industries from the organised sector where workers have access to better health services. "About 80 to 85 per cent of workers are from unorganised sector. They have no medical facilities or access to ESI services. If they get seriously injured, they lose jobs without rehabilitation. In a nut shell, occupational health services for such workers is nil," says former president of Indian Association of Occupational Health (IAOH), Bhaktiar Chowdhary. Occupational health experts believe that there has been no concerted effort from the government to provide occupational health services to workers in the unorganised sector. "It's a curse for workers in the unorganised sector. The Labour Department and Inspector of Factories have not seriously attempted to address the issue," the experts say. A host of industries such as fabrication, small scale industries, hotels, glass and dye factories, civil works, carpentry, electricians, welders and many more belong to unorganised sector. "In Europe, there is no industry which is not organised. All of them are under strict labour laws and workers have access to occupational health services. Authorities should make a start here in Hyderabad," says Dr. Bhaktiar. (The Hindu 10/7/12)

#### **Street vendors in Haryana to get health insurance (14)**

Chandigarh: The Haryana government has extended the benefit of national health insurance scheme to street vendors. Under the scheme, each family will get reimbursement of medical bills up to Rs 30,000. "Now street vendors would also be covered under the scheme. The concerned municipal committee or council would identify such families and prepare a list and their smart cards would be prepared by the Health Department," a government spokesperson said. BPL families were being covered under the scheme. The government has already decided to extend the benefit of the scheme to MNREGA workers, he said. (Zee News 11/7/12)

#### **CITU demands that minimum wage be fixed at Rs. 10,000 per month (14)**

Shimoga: The activists of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) staged a protest in the city on Tuesday demanding the Union and State governments to take initiatives to protect the interests of workers serving in the unorganised sector. CITU district unit vice-president S.B. Shivashankar told presspersons that the Government should fix Rs. 10,000 as minimum wage per month for the unskilled workers serving in unorganised sector. It forms the responsibility of the officials of the Department of Labour to ensure that minimum wage was paid for all the workers serving on contract basis. The services of the contract workers who had worked for more than 10 years service in government establishments should be regularised, he said. The process of issuing identity cards for all the workers serving in the unorganised sector as per the Unorganised Sector Workers' Social Security Act 2008 should be expedited. He demanded that the Government bring the unorganised sector workers under the ambit of Janashree Bima Yojana and Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana. L. Range Gowda, CITU district unit general secretary, said that the United Progressive Alliance Government at the Centre had failed to control the prices of essential commodities. He demanded the State Government to withdraw the cases registered against workers. The leaders who spoke on the occasion demanded the Government should issue ration cards, allot sites, and to provide social security benefits for the unorganised sector workers. The organisations which represent the contract workers serving in Visvesvaraya Iron and Steel Limited (VISL), Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), Mangalore Electricity Supply Company (MESCOM), Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), Indian Oil Corporation (IOL), Grama Panchayat Workers

Association, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) Association, and Anganawadi and Mid Day Meal Scheme Workers Association had extended support to the protest. The protesters submitted a memorandum to Deputy Commissioner seeking fulfilment of their demands. (The Hindu 11/7/12)

#### **Trade unions seek full-time labour officer for social security schemes (14)**

TIRUCHI: Absence of a full-time labour officer for social security schemes implemented through State welfare boards has caused a huge backlog of applications from labourers in the unorganised sector, especially those in the construction industry, in Tiruchi district. Ever since the suspension of the then labour officer (social security scheme) in 2009, officers in the Department of Labour are holding additional charge of the post, impacting on the implementation of the social security schemes of the welfare boards, trade unions allege. This is a key post processing applications from members of different welfare boards functioning in the State. Trade union leaders claim that hundreds of applications from unorganised sector labourers, especially construction workers, seeking compensation for natural deaths, marriage assistance, and pension have been pending for the past two years. Tiruchi district being one of the biggest has over four lakh workers and attracts a large number of applications for membership, renewals and claims every day. "Over 150 labourers through the Labour Department office dealing with the social security schemes in the city every day seeking membership registration, renewals or other claims. Except for four, all other employees in the office are temporary staff. This has resulted in huge backlog of files. Many of the pending applications were old ones having been submitted over a year ago," said V.Kalyanaraman, State vice president, Indian National Trade Union Congress. While smaller districts, with much less applicants, have full-time and exclusive officers looking after social security schemes, it is inexplicable that there has been such a long delay in appointing an officer for Tiruchi, where over 2,500 applications are received every month on an average, he said. Mr.Kalyanaraman, who has petitioned the Chief Minister seeking her intervention in the matter, said that compensation for natural deaths should be given within 15 days of receipt of application as per rules. But over 100 applications have been pending for over one-and-a-half years in the district. Similarly, several other applications seeking marriage and maternity assistance are also pending, he claimed. Most of the applications that are pending relate to cases which require enquiries. For instance, enquiries have to be conducted with respect to death and marriage assistance claims. Given the meagre staff and the absence of a full-time officer, there has been inordinate delay in completing the enquiries, said K.Suresh, State vice president and district secretary of AITUC Construction Workers Union. "The appointment of a full-time officer is imperative to process the applications quickly. Besides, an exclusive district office should be set up for construction workers welfare board," he said. Sources in the Labour Department while conceding that there was some backlog of applications, however, said that most of the applications were old ones and those requiring enquiries. They claimed that fresh applications for death compensation, pension and educational assistance were being processed as quickly as possible. (The Hindu 13/7/12)

#### **Corruption plaguing implementation of MNREGA: Govt (5)**

New Delhi: The government today admitted that corruption is plaguing implementation of its flagship programme MNREGA and there is a need to address the issue meaningfully. "Though the achievements of MNREGA have been impressive, there have been issues with regard to its implementation that need to be recognised and addressed meaningfully...There has been public concern over misappropriation of funds and resources in MNREGA," Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh said in a research paper on the UPA's ambitious programme. He expressed hope that measures such as notification of Social Audit Rules, which makes it mandatory to have a social audit conducted by Gram Sabha and asking Comptroller and Auditor General to conduct a performance audit of MNREGA, would help address the concerns of corruption. The minister also highlighted the achievements of the rural job scheme in 'MGNREGA Sameeksha', an anthology of research study on the flagship scheme, which was released by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh here. "While implementation remains uneven and patchy across states and districts, there is evidence to suggest that MNREGA has contributed to increased rural wages everywhere, reduced distress migration from traditionally migration-intensive areas, usage of barren areas for cultivation and empowerment of the weaker sections and giving them a new sense of identity and bargaining power," Ramesh said. The study said works carried out under MNREGA have led to a rise in groundwater, improvement in soil quality and reduction in vulnerability of production systems to climate variability. "Micro-level studies indicate that the water conservation structures, desilting of traditional water

bodies, plantations and other works taken up in MNREGA, have improved water percolation and helped recharge groundwater," it said. This has also led to a rise in groundwater levels and water availability, increasing the area under irrigation in some cases, the study said. "An assessment of 34 anicuts (stone bunds) in Rajasthan observed that on an average, an anicut built under MNREGA was irrigating an area of 26 hectares and enhancing groundwater recharge for 3 to 25 wells leading to a rise in water levels between 10-40 feet," the study said citing an example. It says that an application of excavated silt from MNREGA works has the potential to add to soil fertility. "In Chittoor (Andhra Pradesh), excavated silt was applied to 36,000 acres of degraded lands belonging to SCs, STs and BPL families. This increased the soil fertility in terms of nutrients found in the soil," the research paper said. Croplands that had been treated by silt excavated from water bodies, recorded a two to threefold increase in the organic carbon content. Observing that MNREGA creates green jobs that contribute to environmental sustainability, the study said the rural job scheme is directly related to climate change mitigation and adaptation activities. (Financial Express 14/7/12)

#### **Construction workers urged to register with board (14)**

DHARWAD: "Many schemes of the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board have not yet reached the intended beneficiaries owing to lack of awareness among workers in the building and construction sector in the State," said High Court judge K. Sridhar Rao. He was speaking after inaugurating an awareness programme organised by the Karnataka Legal Services Authority in association with the district administration here on Sunday. Mr. Rao said Rs. 1,200 crore had been lying unutilised with the board for quite some time and added that the registration of construction and other building workers had remained comparatively low. Mr. Rao underlined the need for workers getting compulsorily registered to avail themselves of benefits of welfare schemes. Those working at construction sites should voluntarily register their names with the Labour Department, he added. He said 40,000 labourers were involved in building construction but only 7,000 of them had registered their names. Mr. Rao said the legal services authority was playing a major role in helping the board implement its schemes. Legal awareness programmes would be launched in every district and the first of its kind was held in Bellary recently. Identity cards would be issued to labourers, and they could avail themselves of medical facilities for their wards, scholarships and compensation. "The authority will provide legal aid for free to labourers," Mr. Rao said. (The Hindu 18/7/12)

#### **State's welfare scheme for labourers fails to take off (14)**

PUNE: The labour welfare cess, calculated at 1% of construction cost, has failed to improve the condition of construction workers in the state as nearly Rs 642 crore, meant for accident compensation and pension benefits for construction labourers and educational scholarships for their children, is lying unused with the government. State labour minister Hasan Mushrif admitted that there has been a delay in implementing the scheme, but he blamed the local self-government bodies for failing to transfer the funds to the state's coffers on time. The delay has resulted in slowing down the implementation of the scheme, he claimed. Speaking to TOI over phone, Mushrif said, "It is true that the state government is lagging behind in implementing the schemes meant for construction workers, compared to states like Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. The main hurdle in implementing the scheme is the limited manpower at the labour department and non-transfer of cess amount to the department by municipal corporations and councils. Though the department has received Rs 642 crore till May this year, the actual amount should have been Rs 1,200 crore." Collection of the cess was made mandatory under The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment & Conditions of Service) Act, 1996. The state government notified the act in 2007, but the actual collection started more than a year back. The 1% cess is being levied on all public and private construction projects having an outlay of more than Rs 10 lakh. A senior labour department official said, "Only 50,000 construction labourers in the state are registered with the department, while the actual number could be in lakhs. The manpower problem at the labour department was hampering the registration work. A large number of workers come from states like Orissa and Rajasthan. Speaking to them is a problem as they don't understand Hindi or Marathi. Moreover, they refuse to talk to government officials, fearing it could lead to some legal action, the official added. (Times of India 18/7/12)

#### **Rs. 12.7 crore given as pension to farm workers (14)**

KOTTAYAM: The Labour department has disbursed approximately Rs. 12.7 crore as pension to farm

workers through local bodies during the previous financial year. According to the statistics released by the District Labour Office, the department has also provided amounts of Rs. 8 lakh and Rs. 10.75 lakh to tree-climbers in plantations and those involved in the unorganised sector respectively on account of pension. As many as 1234 families have been enrolled in the insurance scheme implemented for those owning less than five cents of land. As part of the scheme, a total amount of Rs. 27.09 lakh was distributed among students of these families as scholarship. The Labour department also claims to have ensured that the labour laws have been strictly abided to in the nursing sector. Inspections have been conducted regularly in various hospitals in the district to ascertain that nurses are provided the prescribed minimum wages, annual salary hikes and their working hours are limited to eight hours. In addition, medical camps and awareness camps were conducted at three centres of the district for the benefit of migrant labourers. Measures were also adopted to prevent the illegal practices of child labour and bonded labour. (The Hindu 21/7/12)

#### **Labour department has no data of construction workers (14)**

VIJAYAWADA: The Labour Department officials in the district are in a quandary with the introduction of National Pension Scheme (NPS)-Lite, a scheme aimed at extending the coverage of NPS to the weaker and economically disadvantaged sections of the society. The Labour Department here has no data of the construction workers, who have registered to avail the benefits provided under the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions Service) Act, 1996. The department officials had registered 1.10 lakh people engaged in construction activity. The workers were issued identity cards etc. The department, however, has no data of the workers registered with the Andhra Pradesh Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board. The problem came to light when the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) asked the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) to enrol the construction workers for the pension scheme. The DRDA would have to enrol workers not exceeding 5,000 workers in the district. The SERP had asked the Assistant Commissioners of Labour to furnish the list of building and construction workers to the Project Directors of DRDA-IKP so that the PDs would take up the enrolment process. Following which, the Labour officials began searching for the data, and could not find any data of the 1.10 lakh workers registered with it. The situation was no better in other districts as well. More than 12 lakh people were registered with the Board across the State. However, there was no consolidated data, sources say. The officials say that the problem cropped up due to non-availability of software. The data from the district was sent to the Board which has to consolidate and maintain the data. However, no such measures were taken. On the other hand, the Labour Department here also has no copy of the data, sources say. As the NPS-Lite, the worker in the age group of 18-50 would have to pay Rs.200, the Board would pay Rs.800 and the Central Government would contribute Rs.1,000 taking the total to Rs.2,000. It aims at building up a corpus sufficient enough to buy an annuity for their old age. (The Hindu 22/7/12)

#### **Job scheme still not driven by demand, says Aruna Roy (14)**

THRISSUR: Despite its success in improving the livelihood of rural poor and plugging distress migration from villages, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has still not been able to provide demand-driven employment guarantee, National Advisory Council member and Right to Information activist Aruna Roy has said. She was at the Kerala Institute of Local Administration here on Wednesday to attend a meeting to take stock of the implementation of MGNREGS in the State. "Though the scheme offers legal compensation for not providing work on demand, not many workers are aware of their rights. So the compensation is rarely given," she noted. According to a study conducted among 1,200 workers in four districts — Palakkad, Wayanad, Idukki and Kasaragode — 80 per cent of the workers were not aware that the scheme would offer job on demand. "Lack of innovative projects has been dampening the spirit of the scheme. Failure in preparation of a shelf of projects is another problem. Labour budget is affected by lack of proper planning. Currently, labour budgets are supply-driven; determined by the capacity to provide work," Ms. Roy said. Many poor workers are forced to look for other jobs as there has been delay in payment of wages under the job scheme, she said. Ms. Roy said that cutting down on delays in payment of wages to workers and improving quality of assets created should be the two major focus points of the scheme. "Social audit of the projects is mandatory. The scheme needs better grass roots planning to create durable and productive assets." She said that many States still have not appointed an ombudsman. The MGNREGS, however, has made a remarkable contribution in improving area under cultivation and water conservation. In the next 20 years, the scheme will be vital in

the development of the county, she said. K. Raju, joint secretary of the National Advisory Council said the Union Ministry of Rural Development had issued two revised guidelines for the MGNREGS. Under the revised guidelines, the Gram Panchayats can authorise organisations like Kudumbasree and Anganwadis to collect applications for jobs and issue dated receipts to applicants. The guidelines also insisted that local-specific goals for improving the livelihood of the people be implemented. Many speakers felt that the State needed a tailor-made package for the implementation of the job scheme in the State considering its specific needs. The meeting stressed the need for conducting local need assessment before preparing projects and a proper documentation of model projects. Many times money has been wasted on thoughtless projects, the meeting observed. (The Hindu 26/7/12)

#### **'FDI in retail will hurt livelihood of workers' (14)**

New Delhi: BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi on Friday opposed any proposal to allow foreign direct investment (FDI) in the retail sector, saying that it would hurt the livelihood of workers in the unorganised sector. "We don't need to care about the sufferings of multi-nationals but we need to care about the sufferings of the common man," he said at a function organised by the Bhartiya Jan Mazdoor Sangh here. "FDI in retail would lead increase in job losses in the unorganised, agriculture and labour sectors," he said. Referring to the neighbourhood shops, he said, "I have decided to stand by the neighbourhood stall owner." The BJP leader said that a revaluation of the whole economic infrastructure needed to be done as the present model had led to an increase in consumerism and was promoting a culture of disparity. On what will be his stand in case Team Anna launched a political party, he said, "This is a matter between the people and them. What can I say on this." (Zee News 27/7/12)

#### **Compulsory registration rule for all street vendors (14)**

New Delhi: Delhi health minister Ashok Kumar Walia said the government would start registering vendors and issue food licenses very soon. He said the government had roped in a Government of India's undertaking organisation to carry out the exercise. "We have decided to outsource the job of registering of the vendors to the National Institute of Smart Governance. The institute will start with six centres in the Capital and each centre will have 10 counters where vendors can register. Later, more centres will be opened," Walia said. He said the government's website would also have a link where vendors will be able to upload their documents for registration. Under the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006, which was implemented across the country in 2011, any person engaged in food business will have to register and obtain a licence to run his business. The vendors will have to fulfil safety and hygiene conditions to obtain a licence. Under this, all sorts of food businesses, including fruits and vegetables sellers, roadside tea stalls, grocery and milk shops, restaurants, hotels, canteens and caterers will have to obtain a licence. The food licence will be in addition to other licences that the business establishments take from the local civic agencies, excise, tax and police. Though the government had earlier fixed August 4, 2012, as the deadline for all states to complete the process, Delhi government officials said the deadline had been extended by six months. Officials said the vendor would be liable for sale of any sub-standard food material and liable for action. Failure to get themselves registered will also attract heavy penalty. (Hindustan Times 30/7/12)

#### **Church to address migrant labour issue (14)**

KOCHI: Thousands of migrant labourers streaming into Kerala are doubly disadvantaged--Uprooted from home they suffer major displacement, and in their new places of work they are often inhumanly exploited. The Catholic Church in Kerala, in true apostolic fashion, is now trying to address this problem at source. Help desks will be opened by the church in every district in Assam, Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa from where the maximum number of labourers come to Kerala for work. Under the auspices of the Workers India Federation, an NGO working for the welfare of unorganized workers under Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, a taskforce has been constituted for the purpose. "When a migrant labourer approaches the help desk in his native village, a certificate attesting his bona fides is issued. He is also given a brief on living and labour conditions in Kerala," said Fr. Jaison Vadassery, associate director, Ernakulam Social Service Society, an organization attached to the Varapuzha Arch Diocese. The church's initiative comes at a time when the state government is clueless about labour influx and has failed to ensure basic amenities for them. Similarly, a labourer on arrival in Kerala will contact a help desk. We will open facilitation centres in Kochi, Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram," said Joseph Jude, secretary general, Kerala Labour Movement (KLM). Fr Jaison said assistance will be extended to women

who are employed as domestic maids to find a job if they are out of one. "This initiative will ensure that migration assumes a structured pattern. This will prevent issues of human trafficking and duping of migrant labourers," said Fr. Jaison. The church will also provide temporary accommodation for the labourers. "We are hoping to begin the whole process in a month's time after the action plan is ready," Jude said. (Times of India 1/8/12)

#### **Theatre staff win fight for minimum wages (14)**

CHENNAI: A labour court in the city has directed the management of the Devi group of theatres to pay Rs 48.2 lakh to 67 of its employees, on the ground that they had not been paid the minimum wages for several years. D Jayachandran, presiding officer of the principal labour court, passed the order on a joint claim petition filed by 67 of the 82 employees of the theatre complex, on July 10. It was the case of petitioners' counsel S Vaidyanathan that these employees were not being paid minimum wages or their wages were not revised in spite of several notifications pertaining to revision of minimum wages. The counsel said the differential minimum wages from 1996 should be paid to them. The management, however, denied the allegations of wrong calculation of wages and said its employees were paid monthly wages as per the Minimum Wages Act. There is no violation of minimum wages notification and the present claim was based purely on the wrong methodology adopted by the workers, it said. Convinced that there were differences in the calculation, as admitted by an assistant manager of the theatre in cross-examination, the judge asked the theatre to pay up. (Times of India 2/8/12)

#### **Cabinet may discuss providing protection to street vendors (14)**

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet is likely to discuss a legislation on Friday that seeks to protect over 10 million street vendors from getting harassed by authorities and help them earn a dignified livelihood. The legal framework seeks to legitimise their vending and relocating them to vending zones and pay for their maintenance. The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill, 2012, mooted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA) has its genesis in Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council's (NAC) suggestion to enact a legislation for legitimising vending and ensuring adequate protection for them. The Supreme Court too had earlier directed the government to convert its National Policy for Urban Street Vendors into a law. The Bill aims to ensure compulsory registration for every street vendor aged over 18 by the respective Town Vending Committees (TVCs), which will specify the vending zone, the time limit and terms and conditions of use. In these TVCs at least 40 per cent members will be drawn from the street vendors (one-third of which shall be women vendors). "The Bill is a satisfactory one as it seeks to legitimise the livelihood of the vendors. It is in sync with what we have been saying so far — to remove the vulnerability of vendors from the licence raj," NAC member Harsh Mander told The Indian Express. They will be issued identity cards along with certificates for vending and will be asked to pay a fee to local municipalities. The legislation also protects legitimate vendors from confiscation of goods by authorities, by allowing them to reclaim their goods. In addition, local authorities have been empowered to set up a permanent committee consisting of a person who has been a sub-judge or a judicial magistrate to redress vendors' grievances. The HUPA ministry said the urban informal economy produces 26 per cent of the country's GDP and employs about 25 per cent of its workforce. It cited a 2007 report of the National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganised Workers, which says that majority of informal sector workers are vulnerable with no legal protection of jobs, working conditions or social stability. (Financial Express 3/8/12)

#### **Cash benefit for Jharkhand's migrant workers (14)**

RANCHI: The state labour department has come up with an ambitious scheme to track the migrant workers of Jharkhand and provide financial assistance to them or their kin in case of casualty or permanent disability. Under the new scheme, every migrant worker will be registered with the local panchayat and an identity card will be issued. The panchayat will also issue registration certificate to local employment agents. Sources in the labour department said according to a rough estimate 10-15 lakh workers migrate to various parts of the country in search of employment every year. Many of them face lot of hardship and even die in accidents. The system of compulsory registration will help build an authentic data bank of the workers. State labour commissioner Sunil Kumar Barnwal said migrating workers who were registered with an agency or agent would be issued green colour card and those who move out of the state in search of a jobs alone would be issued red colour card. Apart from tracking migrant workers, the department will also study the reason and season when the workers migrate. "We will try to generate

employment for them in places close to their village in coming years so that they do not have to wonder in search of a jobs," said Barnwal adding that the department would definitely try and find some suitable job for seasonal migrant workers with the state. The department has also decided to provide financial assistance to each migrant worker and their kin in case of permanent disability or death. In case of death of a worker or permanent disability government will also provide Rs 1.5 lakh. In case of partial disability the worker will get Rs 75,000. "All the claims will be made with the deputy commissioner of the concerned district and depending on the case the workers or his kin will be the benefit," he added. (Times of India 6/8/12)

#### **Contractual safai workers to continue in urban local bodies (14)**

The services of safai karmacharis appointed on contract basis in urban local bodies in the UP will not be terminated, says a circular issued by principal secretary, urban development Pravir Kumar to all district magistrates, municipal commissioners and director, local bodies. It has been clarified in the circular that the government order (GO) issued on July 23 regarding immediate termination of services of contractual employees appointed in an irregular and arbitrary manner in urban local bodies will not cover the contractual safai workers. Fishermen body demands SC status: National Association of Fishermen at a national meeting held here on Sunday has demanded Scheduled Castes (SC) category reservation for Nishad, Bind and Kashyap communities. National chairman of the association GK Bangi has accused Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party of misleading Nishad, Bind, Kashyap, Dhiwar, Kahar, Manjhi, Turaha, Godia, Rajbhar and Prajapati communities in the name of providing them SC status. Rich tributes paid: Senior officers of the regional headquarters of Indo-Tibet Border Police Force (ITBPF) have paid rich tributes to Dr Fauzia Turk, medical officer, ITBPF, who died recently. She was posted at 42<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the force in Lucknow. She had joined the ITBPF as medical officer on July 27, 2010 and in a very short time earned laurels for being an efficient officer in the medical field. People remember Janeshwar Mishra: Krishna Kutumb Media (Trust), a socialist social service organisation, paid rich tributes to a great socialist thinker and a source of socialist movement late Janeshwar Mishra on Sunday. Convener of the organisation Suresh Krishna Yadav speaking at a function said that it is the duty of every person who believes in socialist ideology to strengthen the socialist movement in the country help the SP government to fulfil its commitments made to the people of the state. (Times of India 6/8/12)

#### **Pensioners' rally on August 9 (14)**

Bangalore: The Karnataka State Pension Parishad will take out a rally in the City on August 9 seeking relaxation in the age limit to avail pension. "The age limit must be fixed at 55 years for men and 50 years for women as opposed to the present 65 years," Sudha, a member of the Parishad, said at a press meet here on Tuesday. The Parishad wants the government to fix minimum pension at Rs 2,000 per month against the present Rs 400, and revise the pension once in two years at least. The current pension was fixed almost eight years ago and there had been no revision since then. "How can one expect to lead even a substandard life with the paltry sum," Sudha questioned. Social activist Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey, Baba Adhav have confirmed their participation in the rally while former chief minister H D Kumaraswamy, theatre personality Master Hirannaiah are also expected to take part. Construction workers and sex workers from several parts of the State too will take part in the rally, which will begin from the Freedom Park at 11 am, she said. (Deccan Herald 8/8/12)

#### **Panel for early decision on pension for EPF subscribers (14)**

New Delhi, Aug 8: The Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Labour & Employment has called for expediting the decision to provide a minimum pension of Rs 1,000 to all EPF subscribers. The Government was also urged to speed up the process of registering all unorganised workers, especially in the construction sector. Over 90 per cent of the workforce is employed in this sector. The meeting of the Committee, which was held here on Tuesday, also wanted due patronage to be given to traditional skills while ratifying the Conventions adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), especially with regard to child labour. Assuring the members, Labour Minister Mallikarjun Kharge said "We ratify a Convention when we are fully satisfied that our laws and practices are in conformity with the relevant ILO Convention." The ILO has so far adopted 189 Conventions and 201 Recommendations. Out of these, India has so far ratified only 43. The Minister pointed out that some member states of ILO were facing challenges on ratification of Conventions due to their non-conformity with national laws and lack of

technical assistance. (Business Line 8/8/12)

### **7 bonded labourers rescued (14)**

Tiruvannamalai: Seven persons working as bonded labourers in a brick kiln have been rescued by K. Priya, Revenue Divisional Officer, Cheyyar, on Thursday. Acting on a complaint by International Justice Mission (IJM), an NGO, Ms. Priya conducted a rescue operation in Rantham Korattur village in Arani taluk and found 7 adults working in a brick kiln and tree cutting unit run by one Anthony as bonded labourers. RDO rescued these seven adults and four children from the clutches of bonded labour system. "They were in the bondage for five years" a release from IJM said. "Anthony paid these victims approximately Rs.300-500/ a month per family and they were made to work for more than 12 hours a day. He also denied the labourers freedom of movement and the freedom to work outside of the facility," the release added. Ms. Priya issued release certificates to all the seven victims soon after they were rescued. (The Hindu 10/8/12)

### **'Labour rights will make difference' (14)**

CHENNAI: Denying migrant workers their right to register with various welfare departments remained a stumbling block in their betterment, said R. Geetha, additional secretary of Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangam. This made it difficult to provide them with compensation, relief or even identification in case of accidents, she said, advocating the creation of an exclusive cell within the labour department to deal with migrant workers. Talking to The Hindu on Thursday, Ms. Geetha, who has worked among migrant workers, cited a Supreme Court order that made it mandatory for all government contracts to register workers under the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996. She said migrant construction workers, roughly estimated to be about 12 lakh in Tamil Nadu, were eligible for compensation from the Construction Workers' Welfare Board because the one per cent cess collected from all construction projects was going to the welfare board. "Since migrant workers are not allowed to become members of the welfare board, they are not able to get compensation. For example, if you calculate the total cost of the metro rail project to be Rs. 1,000 crore, the cess which is due to the workers on the site should be Rs. 10 crore. But the present system denies a worker his due, which is a matter of right. On the other hand, solatium has been released from the Chief Minister's relief fund," she said. Ms. Geetha said migrant workers were working for low wages, living in squalid conditions without access to basic amenities and their children were denied education as they had been given the task of guarding their tin-roofed sheds without doors. She pointed out that safety rules notified by the State government in 2006 were very clear that whenever there was an accident, the families of the victims, police and labour department should be informed within 24 hours. "Whether it is a private construction work or otherwise, the government cannot abdicate its responsibility of upholding safety norms in work places," she said. Moreover, under the Workmen Compensation Act, the labour department should ask the employer to deposit the money after calculating the quantum of compensation in the wake of accidents. Subsequently, the labour department in the home State of the worker should be intimated for verifying the dependents of the victims. Ms. Geetha also wanted the government to ensure that 50 per cent of local workers were involved in all big construction activities. "Local workers are more assertive and get wages that are in vogue in the market. Migrant workers will also benefit when they work with the local workers," she said. After allowing migrant workers to register with the welfare board, the government could issue temporary ration cards and set up child care centres, she said. "They get poor wages, are treated as outsiders and spend more money in the open market to buy provisions. Temporary ration cards will allow them to procure essential commodities under the public distribution system," she said. (The Hindu 10/8/12)

### **HRW tells Nepal to protect, not ban young women migrating to Gulf (8)**

New York: The Nepali government should revoke its new ban on women under the age of 30 from working in Arab Gulf countries, and instead, should improve protections, so that domestic workers can migrate safely – such as by ensuring full monitoring and accountability of recruitment agencies in Nepal, Human Rights Watch said today. At the same time, it said that governments in the Gulf should adopt long overdue labor protections and immigration reforms, including ending the discriminatory treatment of domestic workers, to combat the abuse of Nepali and other migrant workers. On August 9, Nepal's cabinet approved a ban on women under the age of 30 from traveling to the Gulf for work. The ban is a

response to several publicized cases of abuse of Nepali domestic workers, including long work hours, unpaid wages, and in some cases physical or sexual abuse. This recent move comes two years after Nepal lifted a 12-year ban on any women working in Middle Eastern countries. "Nepal is right to be concerned about its migrant domestic workers, but imposing a ban on women under 30 from traveling to the Gulf does not solve the problem and discriminates against young women", said Nisha Varia, senior women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. "A better strategy would be to crack down on abusive recruitment practices, ensure that women migrate with an enforceable contract in hand, and equip embassies to respond quickly to complaints of abuse." Official Nepali emigration figures state that as many as 1,000 migrants pass daily through Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu; many others leave by land through the porous Indian border. Many domestic workers have positive experiences and together send home billions of dollars in remittances each year to Asia. Others face abuse. Human Rights Watch has documented discrimination and abuse against Asian domestic workers in the Middle East for several years. Labor laws in the Gulf exclude domestic workers from basic protections guaranteed other workers such as a weekly rest day, limits to hours of work, and compensation in case of work-related injury. Restrictive immigration rules make it difficult for domestic workers to escape from abusive employers. A ban on the work in the Gulf may drive women desperate for work to migrate through irregular channels, putting them at greater risk of exploitation and trafficking, Human Rights Watch said. Human Rights Watch interviewed Nepali domestic workers in Saudi Arabia during the previous ban and found that they were especially likely to encounter abuse. (New Kerala 14/8/12)

#### **State continues to neglect a population that fuels growth (14)**

CHENNAI: Ask one of the hundreds of men who have flooded the Chennai Central what his name is. Tamag, he might say. Or Angeu. Or James. You never know. Often they are nameless people with Mongoloid features. Until they gathered at the railway station, many in the city did not realise there were so many of them in Chennai. They are invisible and a silent group of toilers who have made Chennai their place of livelihood. Working at construction sites, many of them don't have identity cards, registration or structured wages. This is in violation of a Supreme Court order that all state governments should register migrant workers under the Building and Other Construction Workers Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996. J K Tripathy, city police commissioner said the police has no database of migrant workers living in the city. The state labor department is yet to prepare a register of migrant workers, even though many of them work for multi-crore government projects in the state. Rubin Singh, a migrant from Guwahati, was lured to work at a construction site near Taramani with an offer of 5,000-8,000 as advance pay. "My first thought was to accept it. But, we get paid only a pittance of 140 for eight hours and 180 for 12 hours a day," he explained before catching a train home via Patna. Experts suggest migrant workers should be brought under the welfare net and provided PDS cover and benefits such as health cards and access to social security services. Kerala, for instance, has put in place a better model, distributing identity cards to thousands of them. The health department there organizes health camps and the labour department inspects sites and fines employers who fail to provide standardized facilities for workers. R Geetha, who works with migrant workers, said the labour department in TN refuses to include migrant labourers in its welfare schemes. "The state is least bothered about thousands of workers who build our metro rail, airport and huge buildings in the city. So, they live like slaves without any social security drawing a pittance of 3,000 - 5000 a month," she said. Madhumita Dutta, an activist of the Campaign for Justice and Peace, who works with about 2,000 migrant workers at a fabrication plant near Sriperumbudur said, "They live like animals. They live in places that are worse than cattle sheds. The sewage and drain water over flows and they prepare food in very unhygienic conditions. (Times of India 20/8/12)

#### **Nutritious food at affordable cost to workers in the unorganised sector (14)**

BANGALORE: "There are close to 5 lakh people in the garment sector and close to 2 lakh people working at construction sites, and they do not have a canteen or mess," said Michael B. Fernandes, the former Member of the Legislative Assembly. He was speaking at the inauguration of the Shramik Aahar Yojane here on Sunday. The yojane is an initiative of the Michael B. Fernandes Shramik Foundation and it aims to provide nutritious lunch at an affordable cost to relatively low paid workers employed in small-scale industries, garment units and for people working at construction sites. According to the existing laws, industrial units are not expected to run canteens if the number of workers is less than 200. According to a release issued by the foundation, close to 1,000 workers will be benefitted in the first

phase that is expected to start in the next three months. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Siddaramaiah, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, said, "There are lakhs of people in the unorganised sector who do not get nutritious food. This will, in turn, reduce their productivity and the overall productivity of the work." Praising Mr. Fernandes's efforts, Mr. Siddaramaiah said that if power was in the hands of good leaders, then lakhs of people would be able to reap benefits of the welfare schemes. Highlighting the corruption in the State, he said: "If people had chosen the right candidate, this (corruption) would not have happened." The event coincided with the 78th birthday of Mr. Fernandes. He and his wife, Dona Fernandes, founder-member of Vimochana, were felicitated. M.N. Venkatchaliah, former Chief Justice of India, and former Minister P.G.R. Sindhia were present. (The Hindu 21/8/12)

#### **Convergence of NREGS with other schemes may hit roadblock (14)**

New Delhi: Finance Minister P Chidambaram's promise to converge the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) with other schemes in drought-hit areas may remain a promise. For, the Ministry of Rural Development says it has no special convergence plan tailored to the needs of drought-hit states. Convergence of NREGS has invited criticism from the civil society, as it is seen as a back-door effort to dilute the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and to divert funds meant for wages. The rural development ministry, under Jairam Ramesh, has steered clear of the topic and has abandoned it in his NREGA version-2 guidelines. Ramesh, who recently made a tour to three drought-hit states, said he was not aware of any such convergence plans. The ministry's proposal to relax the number of work days in NREGA is expected to get the nod from the Empowered Group of Ministers (EGoM) on drought. During his visit to the drought-affected states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka, Ramesh had assured these states that more funds under NREGA would be made available to enhance the number of work days to 150. All blocks which have more than 50 per cent rainfall deficit would benefit from the relaxed norms under NREGA, the ministry said. As for convergence with other schemes, officials said the convergence guidelines drawn in 2009 could apply, and the emphasis could be on drought prevention works in such areas — though there has been no such directive from the ministry on this. When the guidelines on convergence were drawn in 2009, under then Rural Development Minister C P Joshi, the ministry was accused of using convergence for diverting NREGA funds for works possible through other funds. Activists like Jean Dreze and Aruna Roy have staunchly opposed convergence. Another school of thought, represented by activists like K S Gopal, has favoured convergence of NREGA, especially with schemes under the Ministry of Agriculture. Gopal, however, says that convergence can be a back-door effort for fund diversion. The finance ministry would certainly approve of it to achieve fiscal balance, said Gopal, a researcher and development economist at Tata Institute of Social Sciences. He was earlier a member of the Employment Guarantee Council formed under NREGA. Though the two ministries agreed on convergence in 2009, the plan has not gone beyond a few pilot districts. Convergence has failed even within the rural development ministry's different departments, said Gopal. The new guidelines or NREGA 2, which are yet to be notified, would expand the number of works and in this some convergence might be achieved. (Business Standard 22/8/12)

#### **Hospitals under scanner for labour laws violation (14)**

SURAT: Private hospitals in the city have come under the scanner of labour department, which says there is rampant violation of labour rules and inhuman exploitation of nurses, ward boys, peons and other hospital staff. In the past 10 days, the labour department has raided about 20 private hospitals located in different parts of the city and conducted inspection of the records including employee registers. Following reports of harassment of the staff at various super specialty hospitals in the city, deputy labour commissioner KS Gill instructed the department to constitute special squads and conduct the inspections. Official sources said that serious lapses, including denial of minimum wages, no holiday on festival days and denial of benefits for working on holidays, had been detected in various hospitals. "We found that the minimum wage system is absent in most of the hospitals. It is a law to provide minimum wage of Rs 190 per day to the employee, but most of the city hospitals are paying below Rs 150 per day," said Mahesh Patel, assistant labour commissioner. "There was foul play in number of aspects. The employees in some of the hospitals have to hand over their certificates to the authorities, which is a violation of rules. Rules are being ignored in granting leave too. Though the number of leaves has been specified, not many are allowed to take them. The night shift extends to more than 12 hours. We have asked the hospitals to change the practice and to implement three shifts and allot employees their eligible leave," added Patel. Gill told TOI, "The raids on private hospitals will continue in the coming days. This is to ensure that the

employees working in the hospitals are treated as per the labour laws." (Times of India 24/8/12)

#### **“Working poor still facing severe rights violations” (14)**

NEW DELHI: Nidan, a voluntary organisation working for informal workers, women and children, organised a day-long workshop here on Saturday to discuss issues related to human rights violation faced by marginalised sections of society such as working poor, women and children. The workshop also discussed how to develop strategies for intervention and outreach to protect those rights. Among the participants were representatives of informal sector workers organisations, women rights groups and resource centres, child rights organisations and networks, government departments as well as national and international development agencies. There was representation from the marginalised sections as well. Workers across the spectrum including construction, domestic and agriculture to those enrolled in projects under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme shared their perspective on rights violation and narrated how such violations have a bearing on their livelihood, dignity and social identity. Street vendors and waste pickers from different parts of the country also shared their experiences. Nidan director Arbind Singh explaining the agenda and context of the national workshop said: “The cities and towns of our country present a very curious collage of contrasts. We often say that the cities and towns are growing and so are the economies and social development profile, but the fact remains that the working poor still face severe rights violations. Such violations badly impact the right to social dignity in employment.” “The international treaties, the Indian Constitution and the law of the land make secured and dignified livelihood, health, education, non-discrimination and child protection the fundamental human rights, but the informal workers, the women and the children struggle hard to reclaim these rights. We all have to ensure that such disturbing contrasts should not persist. Effective intervention and outreach strategies need to be firmed up to check and counter the continuing vulnerability and marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable, such as informal workers, women and children,” said Mr. Singh. Nidan also announced plans to develop a pool of community-based rights violations whistleblowers and run legal literacy and legal aid programmes for informal workers, women and children in Delhi, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Rajasthan. Under this, legal aid clinics would be opened in the areas of informal sector workers. The organisation would also develop a comprehensive guide book on legal literacy and legal aid aimed at making the poor and vulnerable aware on their Constitutional, legal and labour rights and enabling them to pursue their cases of rights violations in a more effective manner. (The Hindu 26/8/12)

#### **Services of daily wage workers to be regularized (14)**

Bijapur: Minister for Labour and Sericulture B.N. Bache Gowda has said the process of regularising the services of daily wage labourers would soon commence, as the Cabinet was expected to submit its report on the matter shortly. He was speaking after inaugurating the new community hall and office complex of the Department of Labour, constructed by the Karnataka State Labour Welfare Board at Allapur here on Sunday. The Minister said the State had nearly 15,000 daily wage labourers who had served for over a decade on meagre wages. The decision would help regularise their services, he asserted. He said once the process was complete, his department would ensure a minimum wage of Rs. 6,000 to labourers working in various departments in the State. Stating that 92 per cent of labourers worked in the unorganised sector, Mr. Gowda said the government had formulated several social security, medical and pension schemes for their welfare. The Minister said Karnataka had come up with a novel insurance scheme for drivers of private vehicles. He said the government had formulated the Janashri Bima Yojana, with the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), to provide insurance cover of Rs. 75,000 to the families of labourers in the event of their death. The Minister said the Building and other Construction Workers' Welfare Board had already collected Rs. 1,300 crore as cess from the construction companies, which was being used for the welfare of construction workers. (The Hindu 27/8/12)

#### **Govt turns to civil society on MGNREGS (14)**

New Delhi: With efficacy of its flagship rural job scheme being questioned, the Congress-led UPA government has once again turned to the civil society and roped in eminent social and development activists to help it salvage the programme. The Ministry of Rural Development constituted a 14-member programme advisory group to help it implement the new incarnation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The committee comprises Aruna Roy and Deep Joshi, both members of Sonia Gandhi-led National Advisory Council (NAC), which had midwived the

scheme in 2004-05. It also included noted economist Jean Dreze, who was then a member of the NAC and played a key role in conceptualising the scheme. According to an Office Memorandum issued by the MoRD last week, the newly constituted advisory panel would help the government put into operation the new guidelines for the MGNREGS. The new panel would provide support to the state governments for effective implementation of the programme, it added. The NAC — an interface of the UPA government with the civil society — was instrumental in giving shape to the MGNREG Act during the ruling coalition's first tenure in power. Roy and Dreze were among the panel's members, who played a key role in giving shape to the legislation that was aimed at enhancing livelihood security of rural population by providing up to 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Dreze last year quit the NAC, while Roy continues to be the convener of the panel's working group on transparency and accountability in governance. Though the MGNREGS helped the Congress-led coalition retain power in the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, the scheme has been mired in controversies -- particularly due to alleged irregularities, misappropriation of funds and corruption as well as quality of assets created in addition. The scheme has also been blamed for shortage of agricultural labourers. (Deccan Herald 3/9/12)

#### **People have a right to seek employment anywhere: Shinde (14)**

NEW DELHI: Against the backdrop of MNS chief Raj Thackeray threatening to throw Biharis out of Maharashtra, Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde today said people have a right to seek employment anywhere in the country. "Everybody has a right to go anywhere and seek employment," he told reporters outside Parliament House. On Thackeray targeting certain news channels, he said, "It is not fair to target media. At times media criticises people and it should be accepted." Known for his stand against people from Bihar who go to Maharashtra, specially Mumbai, to seek employment, Thackeray had last week threatened to brand them as infiltrators. Thackeray had also accused Hindi news channels of "distorting" his statement. "I want to tell the Hindi news channel to first understand the issue before it is broadcast...otherwise we know how to deal with it," he had said. Reacting to his statements, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had yesterday lashed out at the Maharashtra government for not taking action against the MNS chief for his threat to Biharis. "It is the duty of the central government and the government of the state (Maharashtra) to take note of the conduct of a person like Thackeray and deal sternly with such elements," Kumar had said. (Times of India 3/9/12)

#### **Sexual harassment at workplace Bill passed (14)**

NEW DELHI: The Lok Sabha on Monday passed the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2010, without discussion amid uproar over 'coalgate' scam. The Bill, introduced by women and child development minister Krishna Tirath and approved by the Union Cabinet in 2010, covers women workers in the unorganized sector that employ less than 10 people where service rules are not applied. This includes domestic helps. CPM polit bureau member Brinda Karat said the definition of unorganized sector in the Bill has been lifted from Arjun Sengupta committee's National Commission of Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector report. "According to Vishakha guidelines, all women should be covered by the law. Landlords who employ more than 10 agricultural workers would be outside the ambit of the law," said Karat. She said it was a gross injustice to agricultural workers who are the single largest female component of work force in the country. An amendment to this effect was moved by CPM MP Sushmita Bauri, but it fell through amid the din by BJP members over 'coalgate'. The Bill also does not cover women in the armed forces, said Karat. It defines sexual harassment as laid down by the Supreme Court in Vishaka vs. state of Rajasthan (1997) case. Sexual harassment includes any one or more unwelcome acts or behaviour like physical contact and advances, a demand or request for sexual favours or making sexually coloured remarks or showing pornography. The acts whether directly, or by implication, include any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature. Lawyer-activist Vrinda Grover said, "I hope the Bill does not have provisions for penalizing the complainant for false complaints. This is the most under-reported crime. Such provision will deter a woman to come forward and complain." The Bill provides for complaints and redressal mechanism. Every employer is required to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee. For establishments which employ less than 10 workers, the Bill provides for setting up a five-member local complaints committee (LCC). Those who do not comply with the Act's provisions will be fined upto Rs 50,000. Repeated violation would be punished with higher penalties and cancellation of licence or registration to conduct business. (Times of India 4/9/12)

### **CAs to audit Rs40,000 crore NREGA funds (14)**

Mumbai: In a move that could usher in transparency in one of the flagship schemes of the UPA government, the rural development ministry has announced that chartered accountants will audit the almost Rs 40,000cr expenses/benefits doled out under the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). The ministry issued a circular a few weeks ago prescribing guidelines for the audit and certification of MGNREGA-related activities at the gram panchayat level, by chartered accountants. According to the statistics given by the ministry, the NREGA scheme covers around five crore households, which amounts to 25% of all rural households in the country. The minimum daily wage allowance per day per person is Rs 100, but this rate varies from state to state. The ministry wants to ensure that the Rs. 40,000 crore reaches those whom the scheme is intended to benefit and hence the audit. Union rural development minister Jairam Ramesh, in a message to ICAI's Pune West Study Circle, laid out the rationale behind the NREGA audit. He says, "The role that chartered accountants play in the effective implementation of our programmes is an important one. This is just the first step in utilising the professionalism of chartered accountants in the evaluation of our schemes." Welcoming the move, senior chartered accountant and director of Janata Sahakari Bank Sudhir Pandit said, "We laud this important initiative that will bring about accountability in administration of one of the biggest welfare schemes of the government. The same model could be repeated for other schemes. It is also a signal to CAs that they should expand their horizons into rural areas, which is one of the biggest growth drivers of our economy." Sarosh Irani, CA and convenor of Pune West Study Circle of ICAI, who discussed this issue with Jairam Ramesh and senior ministry officials, feels that chartered accountants should look beyond professional opportunities and start taking an active part in the "nation-building" exercise. (DNA 4/9/12)

### **Samsung to audit 250 suppliers for labour law violation (14)**

Samsung Electronics said on Monday it would inspect 250 Chinese companies which make products for the South Korean firm to ensure no labour laws are broken after a US-based group accused one of its suppliers of using child labour. Samsung also said its audit into working conditions at an HEG Electronics facility in Huizhou in southern China found no under-aged workers. New York-based China Labor Watch said last month seven children younger than 16 were working in the factory that makes phones and DVD players for Samsung. But Samsung said the audit identified several instances of inadequate management and potentially unsafe practices such as overtime beyond local regulations, improper safety measures and a system of fines for tardiness or absences. "Samsung has demanded that HEG immediately improve its working conditions... If HEG fails to meet Samsung's zero tolerance policy on child labour, the contract will be immediately severed," Samsung said in a statement. It said it would conduct inspections for all 105 supplier companies in China which produce goods solely for Samsung by the end of September, and review, via documentation, by the end of the year another 144 suppliers that makes products for it and other firms. "If supplier companies are found to be in violation of our policies and corrective actions not taken, Samsung will terminate its contract with those supplier companies," Samsung said. The move follows allegations earlier this year that Apple's products were assembled in China amid multiple violations of labour laws, including extreme hours. Apple and its main contract manufacturer Foxconn Technology, whose subsidiary Hon Hai Precision Industry assembles Apple devices in China, later agreed to tackle violations of conditions among the 1.2 million workers assembling iPhones and iPads. That landmark decision could change the way Western companies do business in China. (Times of India 4/9/12)

### **How many deaths will it take for protection of construction workers (14)**

MUMBAI: The collapse of a concrete slab at the under-construction Metro site in Mumbai on Tuesday which killed one construction worker and injured 16 others raises crucial questions about the lack of safety measures for such workers across India. There are an estimated 8.5 million workers engaged in construction activities across the country. While they silently transform the face of cities and villages building skyscrapers and flyovers, the vacuum in which they operate is evident from the fact that there is no clarity about their numbers to begin with. Their work is largely informal and contract-based and many work on a migratory basis, flitting from one state to another as the work takes them. Labour boards in individual states are meant to register construction workers, but the boards in most states fail to do this for lack of staff and adequate resources. This means injuries and deaths remain invisible, unless it

involves a high-profile project like the metro. At the core of this apathy, lies the shoddy implementation of a provision tucked away in the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act of 1996. The provision requires that all construction projects with budgets over 10 lakh pay a cess amounting to 1% of the construction cost to the labour welfare board. The money collected is meant to be used for welfare measures of workers besides creating a kitty for the compensation of those who suffer injuries or the kin of those killed. A public interest litigation filed in the Supreme Court in 2006 showed how states had collected less than 10 % of the sum they were required to. The collection in big metros like Mumbai is lesser than 300 crore since the act was notified, a patch when pitted against the frenzied real estate development in the financial capital. This is a mere indication of how badly-off smaller towns and tier-II cities would be. It has been over 15 years since the legislation was passed and such shoddy collections show a lack of will on the part of labour authorities and sheer indifference on the part of builders and contractors to safeguard the rights and dignity of workers. Builders for instance, are required to intimate labour offices about deaths within 72 hours, in vain. It is high-time we shake off such apathy if we aspire to be called a civilized nation by any yardstick. (Times of India 8/9/12)

#### **NREGS: MIS becomes a sham (14)**

Bhubaneswar: The management information system (MIS) of the State Government for tracking hunger and malnutrition has become a farce, it seems. There is every reason to believe that the monthly reports, submitted by the district collectors to the Government on the poverty status, are manipulated, according to sources. Boudh is the only district where people are seeking jobs under the MGNREGS if the MIS reports, submitted by district collectors for the first fortnight of August, are to be believed. Collectors of 29 districts have reported that not a single job-seeker demanded work under the rural job scheme in the first half of August. Only 45 people of Boudh asked for jobs under the food security programme. However, the online report of the Panchayati Raj Department said there was no job-seeker in five districts. What is more galling is that only 376 people demanded jobs under the scheme during the first fortnight of August. The districts which reported 'no demand for job' include Balasore, Bhadrak, Cuttack, Jajpur and Khurda. With monsoon active across the State and kharif operations in full swing, there is a huge demand for labour in agriculture. Besides, there is less demand for wage employment under MGNREGS in which bulk of the projects are earthen works, official sources said. Job demand in Balangir and Nuapada districts was minimal despite the fact the two districts have the dubious distinction of having large-scale migration of labourers. Odisha is the first State in the country to introduce MIS for tracking poverty from grassroots level. However, the pioneering effort of the office of Special Relief Commissioner is now a victim of administrative inertia. As media reports, basing on MIS information, exposed the Government's failure to tackle poverty-related issues, attempts were made at the highest level of the administration to keep away the monthly MIS reports from the media glare. The very purpose of MIS is defeated as no corrective administrative measures are taken to solve the problem, said sources. The sooner the Government realised that MIS is an effective tool to track poverty and other administrative deficiencies in delivery of good governance to the people the better it would be, said a senior Government officer. The Panchayati Raj Department has a bigger role to play as it has maximum field staff. Apart from elected representatives of the panchayati raj institutions, the large number of gram sathis and anganwadi workers of the Women and Child Welfare Department can provide information from the grassroots level about the functioning of livelihood and health-related programmes, the sources maintained. (Indian Express 9/9/12)

#### **Rs 600-cr scam in MGNREGS unearthed (5)**

New Delhi: The Centre has unearthed a massive scam of over Rs 600 crore in the United Progressive Alliance government's flagship programme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), in Karnataka. According to an internal report of the Union Ministry of Rural Development, there was discrepancy in utilisation of funds in 2009-10 and 2010-11 for which the State government failed to give a convincing reply to the Centre. The report was prepared following inputs from the central monitoring committee, which conducted spot study at different places in Karnataka. It was found that funds to the tune of over Rs 600 crore were shown as wages distributed to labourers. But no roster/register of labourers existed at all. Sources in the ministry said initially the State government claimed that these funds were distributed to labourers who availed the jobs under the scheme. However, when inspection found the claim was bogus, the Karnataka government reportedly requested the ministry to consider these (Rs 600 crore) funds as administrative expenditure and close the issue. The Centre,

suspecting that these funds must have been diverted or swindled by officials in connivance with some others after creating bogus claims, sought a detailed report from the state government. Suspecting inconsistency in the utilisation of funds, Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh told Deccan Herald that the state government had been asked to submit a detailed reply on this issue. The ministry, which is further probing the issue, will summon the state government officials to seek their explanation. "We can't close the issue by treating this huge amount as administrative expenditure," a senior official in the ministry said. "The State must explain the bungling." Earlier, the ministry had received a number of complaints of misuse of the job guarantee scheme funds in many parts of the State, including Bijapur, Raichur, Koppal, Chikmagalur, Udupi, Shimoga and Chamarajanagar, between 2009-2011. (Deccan Herald 12/9/12)

#### **West Bengal spends US\$18.5 mil on ICT in welfare scheme (14)**

The West Bengal government has confirmed spending a whopping Rs. 103-crore (US\$18.5 million) contract for end-to-end ICT services to streamline the e-governance applications of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in the state. The government there also plans to carry out biometric verification of workers in order to release payments faster. Workers will be paid on the same day or within two days. A contract was signed between the state 'Panchayat and Rural Development' department and IT provider Tata Consultancy Services for the same. The deal is supposed to integrate the entire MGNREGS process including functions such as enrolment, biometric authentication, secure wage disbursement, and worksite attendance management. A pilot project will be launched in the 'South 24 Parganas' district in West Bengal, and rolled out over the next year to the rest of the state. The government will receive support services for five years after implementation for the ICT solutions. These ICT innovations are expected to significantly increase transparency and efficiency in a system that is being audited and investigated on allegations of corruption. (Governance now 13/9/12)

#### **Govt approves NREGA job for 150 days (14)**

The Group of Ministers (GoM) on drought, headed by Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar [ Images ], has increased the number of days one will get guaranteed work in the drought-hit areas under the Mahatma Gandhi [ Images ] National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) from 100 to 150 days in a year. It also sanctioned additional funds to the drought-hit states under the National Rural Drinking Water Programme that gives Gujarat Rs 245.86 crore (Rs 2.46 billion), Maharashtra [ Images ] Rs 167 crore (Rs 1.67 billion), Karnataka [ Images ] Rs 286.82 crore (Rs 2.87 billion), Haryana Rs 115.47 crore (Rs 1.15 billion) and Punjab [ Images ] Rs 37.2 crore (Rs 372 million). Pawar said the Union Cabinet has already decided last week to reschedule crop loans of farmers in the affected drought areas with reduced interest rate of 7 per cent. (Rediff News 14/9/12)

#### **Fazilka top in providing NREGA jobs (14)**

Ludhiana: Fazilka and Moga emerged at top in providing maximum number of jobs under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) while Ludhiana followed closely by completing the target in mid-September. "From April 1 to September 18, we got 57,384 job cards made, out of which, 10,034 workers were provided jobs. In addition to this, in the district, 1,77,461 workers have been given daily wage jobs," said Fazilka DC Dr Basant Garg. He added that to further popularise MGNREGA, the Centre has decided to set up Rajiv Gandhi Sewa Kendras in different villages. (Indian Express 19/9/12)

#### **Retail FDI: Traders bandh today (14)**

New Delhi: Traders' body CAIT today said its members in different states will observe bandh in protest against the government's decision to allow FDI in multi-brand retail sector. "There will be no commercial activity across the country. Traders in different cities will take out protest marches and demonstrations," Secretary General of the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) Praveen Khandelwal told reporters here. He said several leaders of different political parties, which are also observing the nation-wide bandh, will address a rally of retail traders at Jantar Mantar. About 25,000 trade associations representing five crore traders, hawkers, labourers and farmers will participate in the bandh, Khandelwal claimed. Several political parties, including Trinamool Congress, BJP, JD(U), Samajwadi Party and BSP are opposing the FDI in retail. Contradicting the Commerce Ministry's clarification, CAIT Secretary General

said once the sector is opened to foreign investors they will have to be given the national treatment under different bilateral treaties. He said the government stand that these treaties would not affect the states' rights to allow or disallow foreign retailers was "misleading and baseless". He said that multi-national companies would displace small shopkeepers and will adversely impact traders and hawkers. (Indian Express 20/9/12)

#### **Development lags under NREGA in districts: MP (14)**

Mysore: Member of parliament R Dhruvanarayan said that Mysore district had utilised only Rs 3.80 crore while Dharwad had utilised Rs 28 crore. Inaugurating the workshop on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act here on Friday, he said, Mysore was in 30th place previously but now has headed towards progress. Until September 20, Rs 2.8 crore is utilised by Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka Rs 720 crore. He said, Rajasthan in the country has been successful in understanding and implementing the projects of NREGA. Every one in the state have the knowledge regarding the act. Briefing about the scheme, he said, it provides employment opportunities for agriculture labourers. Many from rural areas usually migrate to urban areas in search of jobs. "Under the act, they are promised of jobs in their native." Citing an interaction with villagers, he said, they are anxious to work and they request for more activities. Though the wage fixed is Rs 150, it provides an assurance to workers of employment. He called upon CEOs, presidents of zilla panchayat, taluk panchayat and gram panchayat to involve themselves for development of their respective villages, which also on other hand offers jobs for rural people. The officials and representatives should concentrate on implementing projects under the sanctioned funds effectively. They should understand the schemes thoroughly and involve in progressive works at respective areas, he said. Regarding misuse of funds, he stated that few officials were suspended at Chamarajanagar on charges of misusing the funds. "NREGA kit of Rs 21 thousand was illegally being sold at Rs 86,000." Zilla panchayat president M Bhagya Shivamurthy, CEO Dr Ajay Nagabhushan, project director Munirajappa, H D Kote ZP president Ningamma, taluk panchayat president of Rona, Gadag district Rudra Swamy and others were present. (Deccan Herald 21/9/12)

#### **Poor spending on construction labour regretted (14)**

HYDERABAD: Union Labour Minister Mallikarjun Kharge has bemoaned poor spending of the corpus created out of collections from builders for the welfare of construction workers. At one per cent of the cost of construction which was recovered as cess from builders, the State-level boards that were constituted under a special legislation collected a corpus of Rs. 7,057 crore but spent only Rs.1,000 crore on the welfare of workers. Only 88.10 lakh out of 4.46 crore construction workers in the country were registered with the welfare boards in different States, Mr. Kharge said inaugurating a national workshop on construction workers here on Friday. The workshop was organised by the Ministry of Labour to sensitise senior labour officials of State governments on the need to step up collection of cess from builders and spend the money on the welfare of construction labour. Wondering where the unspent money was going, Mr. Kharge urged the officials to do something for the workers' children without waiting for consent from government on spending. The boards were also mandated to perform functions such as providing immediate assistance to accident victims and paying pension to workers who completed 60 years of age. He read out figures of cess collected and spent in all the States. He said the national policy on domestic workers would be made into legislation by introducing it in Parliament. The policy aimed to set up a legislative mechanism to address problems faced by domestic workers and provide them a social security cover. State Labour Minister D. Nagender requested the Centre to relax norms to enable the State government develop a comprehensive health insurance scheme for workers by supplementing it with Rajiv Arogyasri, 108 and 104 services. Director General of Labour Welfare in the Ministry of Labour Anil Swarup asked State governments to mandate municipal bodies to collect the one per cent cess from builders while granting building permissions. The Principal Secretary of Labour here J.C. Sharma was also present. (The Hindu 22/9/12)

#### **Bill on regularisation of daily wage workers likely (14)**

Belgaum: The State government is likely to table a bill in the next legislature session, proposing to regularise services of over 17,000 daily wage workers in government departments. The proposed bill will help regularise civic workers, including 4,000 safai karmacharis in unorganised sector, said Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar, speaking at a programme to mark 'Pourakarmika Day' organised by Karnataka State Poura Seva Noukarara Seva Sangha here on Sunday. He said the government needed to overcome

some legal hurdles before tabling the bill in the session, as a case is pending before the Supreme Court. A Cabinet sub-committee headed by Public Works Department minister C M Udasi has recommended regularisation of daily wage workers' services in government departments, he added. (Deccan Herald 24/9/12)

#### **'FDI in retail will uproot street vendors in few months' (14)**

New Delhi: Rediff.com's Priyanka speaks to a number of street vendors in the national capital and tries to gauge their anxieties over government's proposed move to bring in upto 51 per cent foreign direct investment in multi-brand retail. "Selling vegetables is all that we have done all our lives. We don't know any other work, nor are we educated. What else we will do", asks Vimla Devi, a second-generation street vendor at the Shahdara mandi in East Delhi. Like many of the street vendors selling fruits or vegetables in mandis in the capital, or like those selling items of household utilities -- from toothbrushes, blankets, kitchen utensils to street-fashion accessories, etc. -- in weekly markets, Vimla Devi too dreads the concept of these items being sold in air-conditioned shops at a lowered price. The word 'FDI' scares the street vendors who have heard about it. And the scores who haven't are simply unaware of what FDI means or what it could do to their business. Vimla Devi, 32, is the leader of Sri Balaji Redi Patri association in Shahdara, which holds about 250 vegetable and fruit shops. There is a similar association for every few hundred street vendors, or for a cluster of street vendors who put up their shops together in weekly markets across the national capital. (Rediff 25/9/12)

#### **Women allege fraud in NREGS payment (14)**

Coimbatore: Women residents of Palani Goundenpudur village in Cholanur Panchayat on Monday petitioned the District Collector seeking a probe into "irregularities" in disbursement of NREGS wages. The women complained that though they completed the task assigned to them, the clerk in charge of supervising the work and fixing the wages, undervalued their work and paid them only Rs. 105 to Rs. 120 a day against the full wage of Rs. 132. They also said that the clerk threatened to bring down the wages to Rs. 90 a day if they protested. The women said that they were troubled by the intimidation and would not work until the administration ordered a probe. Officials supervising the work tried to explain to them that the wages were fixed depending on the quantity of work they completed. If a group of women fell short of the target, the wage was fixed based on the work completed and then divided among the group members. They explained to the women that not paying the full wages would not amount to a fraud. If the clerk had a wage in their job cards and another in the register, then it could be deemed to be a fraud. The officials, however, promised to verify the records. (The Hindu 2/10/12)

#### **Labourers to protest non-payment of wages ...(14)**

INDORE: More than 3,000 women and children will protest in front of the Barwani block office against the delay in payment under MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). The agitation - Mahapadav - will be organized under the aegis of Jagrut Adivasi Dalit Sanghatna. "The payment to the labourers for their work under NREGS is being delayed by about a year," Madhuri of Jagrut Adivasi Dalit Sanghatana said, adding that there has been a consistent delay. She said Barwani is one among the 100 most backward areas in the country. "The delay in payment is violation of the NREGS norms and Supreme Court directives," said Madhuri adding that the payment should be given to the labourers within 14 days of finishing the work. She added that the Supreme Court had also directed for compensation in case of delay. "We are ready for the court arrest but would not relent unless the state government gives us some assurance on the payment of salaries to the labourers," Madhuri said. (Times of India (Times of India 3/10/12)

#### **Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme takes off in state (14)**

NAGPUR: If the increasing number of projects being completed and the money spent on them is any indication, Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS), a central government scheme, which was not being implemented well until a few years back in state, is emerging as a boon for the rural poor. In last financial year, the total expenditure in state touched Rs1525 crore, the highest ever covering 2,68,680 projects. This year, in six months since March alone, this figure has touched Rs900 crore. Officials say the expenditure in 2012-13 could reach Rs2500 crore. This change has occurred mainly after the state government created a MNREGS commissionerate (Maharashtra) with headquarters in the city last December. The expenditure on various projects under the scheme in state was just

Rs310.36 crore in 2010-11 which has shot up almost five times in past one year and is likely to rise by eight fold in the next. Sharing some of the new additions in the scheme this year and future plans, the MNREGS deputy commissioner Uday Patil told TOI the state government has recently included 'farm ponds', both small and big, under the scheme. The main beneficiaries of the farm ponds are scheduled castes, below poverty line (BPL) residents, Land Reform schemes, Indira Awas Yojna, marginal farmers (below 5 acres of land) who are beneficiaries of the 2008 loan waiver and the Scheduled Tribe and other traditional residents (recognition of forest rights). The scheme has provision of nine different sizes ponds for these beneficiaries beginning from 10X10X3m to 30X30X3m. "The scheme picked up after the state took it up as a priority. The GR including farm ponds in MNREGS came just last month on August 21 based on the decision taken by the government on December 14, 2011," said Patil. The deputy commissioner gives the credit of success of the scheme in the last one year to V Giriraj, principal secretary of EGS in Maharashtra who has been relentlessly working for betterment of the scheme and expanding its reach. For the largest size pond government spends Rs 1.43 lakh in all areas except hilly areas where the cost has been reduced to Rs1.30lakh. The other main works expected to guarantee at least 100 days employment to the beneficiaries include wells, internal rural roads and horticulture plantations. The subsidy under the MNREGS has been increased from Rs35,000 per hectare to Rs 99,000/ha for horticulture plantations. Patil said the state government is launching a massive awareness campaign about different projects and who could be the beneficiaries from October 2, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. The benefits of the scheme are more visible in Gondia, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Bhandara districts as these districts were covered in the first phase while others were covered later.... (Times of India 3/10/12)

#### **Bonded labourers rescued from brick factory (14)**

The Hindu Police, government officials and NGO activists rescued 14 adults and four children from a brick manufacturing unit in Allasandra near Nelamangala on Wednesday. Photo: K.Gopinathan They were confined against their wishes and without wages The last sight Khagapati Kumbhar (39) expected on Wednesday afternoon was a convoy of white government vehicles speeding towards the brick factory where he worked. Mr. Kumbhar and 13 other migrant labourers from his village in the backward Bolangir district of Odisha had been confined against their wishes and without wages in the factory since June. The convoy screeched to a halt, policemen jumped out and surrounded the factory. "Search the place; nobody must escape," an official shouted. Somebody asked the confused and frightened labourers to gather their belongings. They grabbed whatever they could, stuffing them into jute sacks. Some 15 minutes later, Mr. Kumbhar and his wife sat eating biscuits in a bus bound for the Nelamangala Tahsildar's office. The owner of the factory Papanna and his son, Vinod, were nowhere to be seen, raising suspicions they might have been tipped off about the raid. In all, seven women, seven men and four children were rescued by the team comprising the Tahsildar, police, labour officials and NGO activists. A case was registered under various sections of the IPC and the Bonded Labour System (abolition) Act 1976. When Mr. Kumbhar made a phone call for help in mid-August, it was almost like a message in bottle cast into the sea. As days turned into weeks and months, he gave up hopes of ever returning to his home in Khaprakhol village. As he slogged for 13 hours a day at the factory, the activist from his village he had telephoned worked diligently toward a solution. The activist, Sushant Panigrahi, transcribed Mr. Kumbhar's message and sent it to the Bolangir District Magistrate When the district administration did not respond, Mr. Panigrahi emailed the same message to activists across south India, including one in Salem, Tamil Nadu. The mail was forwarded countless times until it found its way to a group of NGO activists in Bangalore. Careful not to alert the wrong people, they debated the best course in a discreet Facebook group. They met on October 5 and chalked out a strategy and on Wednesday they landed at Tahsildar R. Anil Kumar's office demanding a rescue. Two hours later, all the 14 labourers and their children were deposing before Mr. Kumar. Dahinath Suna (37) told the Tahsildar: "Each family was paid Rs. 450 every 10 days for food and other incidentals." For every 1.5 lakh bricks that they baked, the group was promised Rs. 25,000. That worked out to roughly Rs. 4,500 per person per month. When Mr. Suna and Santosh Nag (35) asked for their outstanding wages in August, they said they were thrashed by Mr. Vinod and Mr. Papanna. They made several unsuccessful attempts to flee but were caught by guards and thrashed. "There would be a guard even when we went to have a bath," claimed Poornima (20). In the safety of the Tahsildar's office, Khagapati Kumbhar was still looking jittery as though he expected to be caught and sent back to the factory. "We are Dalits. In our village we are not even allowed to draw water from the well or enter the temple," he told The Hindu. Their agent lured them by promising

construction work in Bangalore. "At that time anything seemed better than living in our village," he said. Now he can't wait to get back. (The Hindu 11/10/12)

#### **MNREGA, panacea for coffee plantations? (14)**

Bangalore: A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce has recommended extension of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) to plantations to overcome labour shortage in the sector, particularly in Karnataka. The 31-member panel, headed by Shanta Kumar, in its report titled 'Performance of Plantation Sector – Tea and Coffee Industry', suggested to the Union Commerce Ministry to extend the job scheme to coffee plantations to take up various works such as construction of water tanks, groundwater and soil management. Coffee is a highly labour-intensive crop requiring about 400 man days per hectare per year for Arabica and 300 man days per hectare per year for Robusta. The panel said, "There has been a serious shortage of workers in plantation areas due to employment opportunities generated by MNREGA and due to migration of workers to urban areas for better avenues. This has adversely affected the timely completion of certain critical operations, which is having an impact on production, productivity and quality of coffee." Shortage of labourers willing to work in the coffee estates and the poor quality of the workforce who are willing to work has also affected the plantation sector. The committee said the lackadaisical attitude of the growers towards labour welfare is also responsible for migration of labour from plantations. In India, coffee is cultivated on about 4.1 lakh hectares, mainly confined to Karnataka (57 p.c.), Kerala (21 p.c.) and Tamil Nadu (8 p.c.), which form traditional coffee tracts. To a lesser extent, coffee is also grown in non-traditional areas like Andhra Pradesh and Odisha as well as the northeastern States. To extend the job scheme to coffee plantations, the panel recommended to the Commerce Department to take up the matter with Union Ministry of Rural Development. The former chairman of the Karnataka Planters' Association, Marvin Rodrigues, told The Hindu that coffee estates have been facing severe shortage of labour. There was a need to undertake massive mechanisation to tackle labour problems. "The committee is of the view that instead of withdrawing or suspending the MNREGA during harvesting season, it may rather be extended to works in coffee plantations." The committee found that a majority of the machinery imported for the coffee industry is either exorbitantly priced or are not suited to local plantations. It suggested that the Coffee Board tie-up with IITs and other reputed institutions for development of indigenous technology for such machines. The committee recommended that the department spruce up the functioning of the Central Coffee Research Institute (CCRI), Chikmagalur, and add dynamism to it through collaboration and exchange programmes, with reputed national and international research institutes/universities so that the coffee industry could gain from the best practices available in the field. "The scientists of the CCRI have been put on lower pay scales in comparison to their counterparts working in other national research laboratories despite their similar/comparable qualifications, duties and nature of work," it said. (The Hindu 11/10/12)

#### **For migrant labour, Kerala is the new Gulf (14)**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: For thousands of migrant labourers who pour into the state from different parts of north and north-east India, Kerala is the new Gulf where they earn above Rs 350/day, six times the national average. A survey by the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) has highlighted that they prefer to form the base of the labour pyramid in Kerala than flying to the Gulf. The survey of their wage patterns and living conditions pointed out that a large number of migrant labourers reach Kerala to work in different sectors like construction, jewellery manufacturing, small scale industry, hospitality services and food processing centres. Apart from high wages, better living conditions also lure them to Kerala. An average unskilled to semi-skilled labourer earns above Rs 350/day, six times national average of Rs 50-70. A labourer earns around Rs 10,000/month. "Migrant labourer reaching Kerala in unreserved compartments need not worry about issues like huge international air fares, shoddy labour camp accommodation and extreme weather conditions that are prevalent in Gulf countries," said Dr S Irudaya Rajan, chair professor, Ministry of Overseas, Indian Affairs, Research unit on International migration who coordinated the first-of-its-kind study. The study, conducted in districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Thrissur and Kozhikode took four months to complete. "Today we can see labourers from these states toiling even in farms and small scale industrial units. The easy rail accessibility from any part of Kerala to their home towns is another reason for the increase in the influx," said a senior official of the labour department. In the sample survey, migrants from West Bengal topped the list with 20% followed by Uttar Pradesh and Bihar representing 20 % of the workforce. Percentage of Tamil migrant workers stood at 18. "This shows a good chunk of migrant labourers are still from Tamil Nadu in spite of the huge increase in

the number of migrants from other parts of the country. Many Tamil workers have settled here with their families. They are self-employed or work in hotel sector and other service industries," Rajan said. While a relatively small section of migrants from other states are professionals and skilled workers, large majority of them are unskilled or semi-skilled workers engaged in construction, works, agriculture, industry and services. The influx of migrant labour comes at a time when there is a decline in migration of Malayalis to Gulf countries. "There is a shortage of labour in Kerala's agriculture sector as the average educated Malayali prefers white collar jobs. This scarcity has created jobs especially at the lower end and also increased the wages much more than the national average," Rajan said. (Times of India 12/10/12)

#### **Unorganised sector to get health cover (14)**

New Delhi: In an attempt to encourage people to go to doctors instead of quacks, Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna will be extended to domestic workers, street vendors, railway porters and hawkers across the Capital, announced state health minister A K Walia. The move will help eight lakh families comprising at least 40 lakh members. The scheme currently covers below poverty line, and vulnerable families identified by Mission Convergence and the construction workers registered with Delhi building as well as other construction workers welfare board. About one lakh families are covered under it. The meeting was attended by representatives from the three civic bodies, NDMC, northern railway, divisional commissioner, Delhi Medical Association, oriental insurance company and labour department which is the nodal authority to implement the scheme. Walia said more people are being covered so that they don't go to quacks or take loans for medical treatment. The registration for the potential beneficiaries is likely to commence next month. Domestic workers can approach resident welfare associations or sub-division magistrate of the area, and the vendors can go to the office of local bodies. Railway porters can contact the local railway authorities. Details can also be obtained through shramik helpline number 12789 (toll free). By making a token payment of Rs 30, a beneficiary family comprising five members becomes entitled to medical benefits of up to Rs 30,000 per year from empanelled hospitals. The scheme also reimburses transport cost to the extent of Rs 100 per admission. The premium under it is paid by the Central government and Delhi government on behalf of the beneficiary. The beneficiary does not have to make any payment for the treatment. He is issued a smart card having essential information of the family that makes him entitled for treatments. It can also be split in case the family's head and beneficiary are staying separately. They both can use the card concurrently. (Deccan Herald 12/10/12)

#### **Enrolment of workers urged under workers' welfare scheme (14)**

KURNOOL: B. Ramanjaneyulu, secretary of the Department of Labour, asked the district administration to take steps for the enrolment of workers for sanction of benefits under the workers' welfare programme. Addressing a meeting here on Monday, Mr. Ramanjaneyulu said all workers in the age group of 18 to 60 were eligible for enrolment. So far, 15.56 lakh workers are enrolled. A pension scheme has been designed for the workers of unorganised sector after retirement and financial support in case of death of the worker, he said. Mr. Ramanjaneyulu said a corpus fund of Rs. 900 crore was available with the welfare board and several schemes were on the anvil in near future. Collector C. Sudharsan Reddy said only 44,000 workers got enrolled in the district. MLA Labbi Venkata Swamy and others were present. (The Hindu 16/10/12)

#### **Women MGNREGA workers first to get Aadhaar-based payments (14)**

RAMGARH: Rural women from poor families with Unique Identity (UID) registration who worked for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) at Marar panchayat of the district were too happy to receive the payment of their wages online as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh launched the Aadhaar-based online delivery system from Dudu in Jaipur on Saturday. This makes it the first village in the country to get the online payment through Aadhaar in a programme organized by Ramgarh district administration at the Marar Panchayat secretariat, nearly three kms from the district headquarters. About 250 beneficiaries of MGNREGA, Indira Awas Yojna, scholarship and social security pension got online payment using their UID and finger prints with the micro-ATMs installed at the venue by Bank of India (BOI) with the support of Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI). The PM along with UPA chairperson, Sonia Gandhi, finance minister, P Chidambaram, Planning Commission deputy chairman, Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Rajasthan Chief minister, Ashok Gehlot witnessed the payment process which was telecast live by Doordarshan. Budha Devi, Saraswati Devi and Yashod Devi, among other MGNREGA workers were simply overwhelmed and said that it was the happiest day of their lives.

Receiving the online payment of MGNREGA wage from the Prime Minister of India in the presence of Sonia Gandhi and other ministers was a huge honour for them. "I would like to work more in MGNREGA schemes as UID-based online payment has made the delivery system easier," Mahangi Devi said. She had worked for five days in MNREGA schemes and earned Rs 600 as wage through the little machine installed in the panchayat bhawan which is near her village. MGNREGA commissioner, Arun who was present in Marar Panchayat secretariat said that as many as 75.52 lakh people of the state have been given their UID number and the state has a target of registering each and every citizen of the state under UID by March 2013, the announcement of which has already been made by Arjun Munda. Talking to media after the PM's speech, Arun said that Aadhar, a 12-digit number issued by UIDAI, on behalf of the Government of India serves as a proof of identity and address anywhere in the country. Aadhar, as the foundation of electronic transfer of benefits on various social sector schemes should yield significant benefits as the Aadhar-enabled applications would be used for making pension payment, wages under MGREGA, public distribution system (PDS), scholarship and payment of social security which would reduce leakage and increase efficiency and accountability in the service delivery system. (Times of India 20/10/12)

#### **'Fill top post in construction workers' welfare board' (14)**

BANGALORE: The Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has threatened to launch an indefinite stir across the State if the post of the Chief Executive Officer of the Karnataka State Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board is not filled. Addressing a press conference here on Friday, CITU general secretary S. Prasanna Kumar said the board has become non-functional as the post of CEO has been vacant for the past three or four months. Even the post of Labour Commissioner has not been filled, he pointed out, adding that the Director of Employment and Training is officiating as in-charge Labour Commissioner. "Hundreds of applications from each district submitted to the board by the poor construction workers to get different benefits are pending. Only two lakh of the 15 lakh workers have registered themselves with the board," said N. Veeraswamy general secretary of the Karnataka State Building & Other Construction Workers' Federation. He said a resolution was taken to hike the benefits to construction workers at a board meeting held on April 3, 2012 that was presided over by the Labour Minister. But nothing has happened since then, (The Hindu 20/10/12)

#### **Salaries of government employees will be Aadhaar-based by February: Ashok Gehlot (14)**

DUDU (JAIPUR): The Rajasthan government has decided to link 10 social schemes being implemented in the state to the Aadhaar card-based service delivery system launched by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Dudu on Saturday. Chief minister Ashok Gehlot said even granting electricity and water supply connections, issuing driving licences, registration of properties, transfer and copy of land titles would be linked to the Aadhaar card. Beneficiaries of the Indira Awas Yojana, the three pension schemes for old age, widow and specially-abled persons, MGNREGA job-cards, ration cards and individual schemes of the rural development and panchayati raj department would be identified by their Aadhaar numbers. "The 6 lakh state government employees will start getting their salaries on the basis of their Aadhaar card numbers by February 2013," the chief minister announced at the public assembly in Dudu. He added, "The social security pension schemes will be linked to Aadhaar by April 2013." UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi had mentioned in her speech that the state government needed to link their social schemes with the Aadhaar identities so that these reach the intended beneficiaries only. "Aadhaar is not just a card, it will become an 'Aadhaar' (basis) of every citizen in the country to demand his rights," Sonia said. Chief minister Gehlot said the state's public distribution system (PDS), too, would be linked to the Aadhaar card. "As a pilot project it shall be implemented in Dudu, Shahpura and Chomu tehsils," Gehlot said. Further, the CM's housing scheme for rural poor would be linked to Aadhaar. The state government's scholarship scheme of providing Rs 500 every month up to five years to one lakh meritorious students for higher education would be based on Aadhaar. The UPA chairperson also launched the state government's Rajiv Gandhi Digital Student Yojana of distributing 56,000 laptops to meritorious school students and distributing motorized tri-cycles to the physically challenged persons. Three beneficiaries each of both the schemes were awarded at the function. Speaking on the occasion, union minister of state for IT, Sachin Pilot said, "The Centre and state governments' schemes will be successful only when every Indian gets the Aadhaar card." Sachin stole the limelight in his Lok Sabha constituency Ajmer (Dudu is party of it), as he got the loudest and maximum rounds of applauds during his thanks giving extempore in praise of the UPA-II government. He even led the gathering of thousands to shout slogans

in honour of Sonia and Singh. The Gehlot government managed to bring an impressive number of people for the function that was held in open fields along the Jaipur-Ajmer national highway. Majority of the state ministers and Congress state president Chandrabhan were present but could not share the dais with the dignitaries from Delhi. Only Rajasthan's union ministers CP Joshi, NM Meena, Mahadev Singh Khandela and Sachin were seated on the dais. (Times of India 21/10/12)

#### **Misuse of NREGS funds: Orissa sends notice to NDMC director (14)**

Bhubaneswar: The director of New Delhi Municipal Council, on deputation, has been served a notice by the Orissa government for her alleged involvement in the misuse of NREGS money while she was serving in the state. Mrinalini Darswal, of 2002 batch cadre, has been accused of being involved in the embezzlement of Rs 2.53 lakh. The notice was served last week. The Orissa general administration department asked Darswal why no action should be taken against her under Rule-3(1) of All India Services (conduct) Rules, 1968, for the funds misuse. In its chargesheet, the Orissa government alleged that Darswal, while working as collector of Nuapada in the poverty bowl of KBK, diverted NREGS money of Rs 2.53 lakh for landscaping and gardening in her residential premises. Darswal has been asked to submit her written statement of defence within 30 days. (Indian Express 21/10/12)

#### **Why India is not on the job (14)**

India might be feted as an 'emerging economy', but it's also a nation of millions of underprivileged - those unemployed, underemployed or working at minimal wages. Clearly, these millions have never been a part of the 'Shining India' saga. Nearly 30 million (mn) of India's labour force is unemployed, 26 mn are officially underemployed, 40 mn want additional work and 35 mn are looking for other alternatives of livelihood. According to a National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) 2009-10 survey, the size of India's workforce is between 430 and 471 mn. The lower number indicates people who look for work every day, while the higher points to those who have joined the workforce at some point in the year. India's official upper limit of unemployment and underemployment is about 70 million — that's more than the population of countries such as France, UK, Italy, South Korea, Spain and Canada. Even this figure is disputed by experts who believe that the actual number is several times larger. The official 6.6% unemployment rate is possibly a mirage created by the complex nature of the labour market. India's labour market is characterised by part-time workers, seasonality of work, underemployment and social factors which restrict many women from joining the labour force. Compared to 56% of our male population, only 23% of women are part of India's total workforce : people who are usually employed. Of the 26 mn usually employed who couldn't find work through the year, 17 mn were women. This results in a huge loss in person-days. In rural India, nearly one-third of women workers' person days are lost annually, while in the cities 15% of working days of women employees go unutilised. There's a significant number of male workers invisibly underemployed. They want additional work or are looking for other avenues. More than 60% cite low wages as the main reason. The visible or invisible lack of work measured through unemployment and underemployment statistics doesn't quite give the true picture. Being employed alone doesn't guarantee an escape from poverty. The official limit of unemployed and underemployed is 70 million while the most conservative poverty estimates (30%) translate into 359 mn people. That means, officially , at least 289 mn Indians are not unemployed, don't want additional income and aren't looking for alternative careers, but are below the poverty line. Perhaps the 'employed yet BPL' crisis is because of a large chunk of people classified in the NSSO's 'self-employed' category . In the absence of reliable data on incomes, a household's expenditure is considered a fairly good indicator of its income . Arranging India's population according to the monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE), it emerges that among the poorest rural 'employed' Indians , 42% are self-employed . The figure is 43% for urban India. Far from being a sign of newfound entrepreneurial confidence, distress is the main reason behind the significant numbers of the self-employed. In the rural sector, even the top 10% have a substantial number of self-employed people, understandable because the bulk are farmers. However, there is a huge difference in the average expenditure of the richest 10% of the rural population as compared to the corresponding urban group, which has a moderately higher proportion of people with regular salaried jobs — 41.4% against 41.1% self-employed. What accounts for the poor quality of employment and disparities in income? The reasons are lack of job creation in the organized sector, the slow rate of shift of employment from agriculture and shortage of skilled labour. Over the years, agriculture's share in GDP has declined but the proportion of the workforce employed in the sector has remained static. From the 1950s, when agriculture constituted about 50% of GDP, its share has fallen to

15% in 2009-10 , but it has remained the mainstay of employment. As a result, average income from agriculture is the lowest among all sectors. According to a recently released report of the ministry of labour and employment, the share of industries is 28% while the remaining 58% of India's GDP comes from the services sector. Although they constitute 86% of India's GDP, services and industries give employment to only 47% of the workforce — 22% in industries and 25% in services. It is evident that part of the employment problem stems from lack of skill development and inadequate creation of opportunities in the non-agricultural sectors.... (Times of India 22/10/12)

#### **Rural job scheme fails to create sustainable assets: Ombudsman (14)**

KOZHIKODE: In a highly critical report on the functioning of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in the district, the ombudsman for the project has said that the majority of the works under the scheme were just namesake projects without any intrinsic worth and muster roll manipulations were taking place in some grama panchayats. Raising serious doubts about the long term social benefits of the project, the ombudsman has submitted a report to the chief secretary and district collector. Ombudsman for NREGS P K Kunhiraman told TOI that though the project had served to put crores of rupees in the hands of the poor through wage payments, it has failed in its objective to create sustainable assets as envisaged under the UPA government's flagship programme. "Over 90% of the works taken up by the panchayats in the district are just namesake projects which do not come under the category of sustainable assets. The works are being carried out without any planning or foresight and seriously lacked in terms of quality," he said. The district had received funds to the tune of Rs 39 crore for the programme during the year 2011-12 and the works were being carried out mainly in the areas of land development, flood control, road connectivity, water conservation etc. The field visits conducted by the ombudsman has also exposed manipulation of muster roll in some grama panchayats to swindle money from the project. The report notes that, "elected representatives of grama panchayats, with the help of mates manipulate muster rolls in a few panchayats." It also calls for keeping the muster roll in the safe custody of the panchayat secretary or any other responsible staff after the work to prevent muster roll manipulation. The ombudsman said he found attendance was not being marked properly in the muster rolls in some panchayats during inspections. Meanwhile, officials of the NREGA cell in the district said that the programme was being implemented based on the central and state level guidelines issued from time to time which had addressed the issues of creating sustainable assets and improve the quality of works. (Times of India 23/10/12)

#### **Delhi Metro workers losing crores in wages (14)**

New Delhi: Workers hired through multiple contractors by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) here have alleged that companies have been denying them their minimum wages and have allotted fake Provident Fund and health insurance accounts to siphon off their money. Questioned about this, officials said that while they were aware of the workers' complaints, they had not yet blacklisted any company, despite the fact that the Delhi Metro paid a share of the workers' PF, which runs into crores, as part of contractors' bills. The DMRC employs over 4,900 workers through more than 19 contractors to work as ticket-vending operators, security guards and housekeepers who clean and sweep metro stations. Rajni Saxena (40) worked as a ticket vendor at Akshardham metro station till January, and was diagnosed with pyelonephritis, an infection in her kidneys, last year. She has regularly corresponded with 11 public offices. Among those she petitioned were President Pranab Mukherjee, the Union Labour Ministry, DMRC, and Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Office during weeks of hospitalisation last year and even after undergoing a kidney surgery three weeks back. Since last December, she has fought the case at the Regional Labour Commissioner's office against her former employer Bedi & Bedi Associates for allotting fake PF and health insurance accounts. The Economic Offences Wing of Delhi Police Crime Branch is now investigating the complaint of Rajni and 58 of her colleagues. "We would work all 30 days without weekly offs but be paid for 15-20 days. On paper our wage was Rs. 8100 but they would pay only Rs. 4500 — that, too, after three-four months' delay," said the mother of three at her Preet Vihar residence as she recuperated from the surgery. Rajni was allotted an Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) card which entitled her to free treatment at ESIC hospitals. But when she was referred for speciality treatment for her kidney at the ESIC hospital at Jhilmil, she found there were no funds in her account. Inquiries at the ESIC office at Kishanganj by Rajni and 24 of her colleagues showed that Bedi & Bedi had not contributed Rs. 25 lakh — including Rs. 6.8 lakh deducted from workers' salary — to ESIC. Fourteen of the 25 workers had been allotted numbers which did not exist in government records. In December

2011, her employer agreed to provide her PF arrears in a meeting attended by DMRC DGM (Operations) Amit Jain at the Delhi Government's Mediation and Conciliation Centre. Two months later, the EPF office in Wazirpur responded that the PF account numbers shown by the company did not exist in government records. "DMRC officials know what is going on. But this January when Bedi & Bedi's contract to provide ticket operators ended, DMRC awarded it a second contract to provide security guards," alleged Rajni. "Also, the company had a contract to provide 800 ticket operators but it hired and gave login IDs to over 3,400 employees after charging Rs. 80,000 to Rs. 1 lakh from each applicant. Why did DMRC officials not question why 2600 extra login IDs were provided?" she demanded. DMRC officials defend their actions saying they allowed Bedi & Bedi a second contract because the company had made a prayer to the Delhi High Court that the investigation against it was still pending. They admitted that they had not been able to verify the genuineness of the PF accounts allotted by contractors. "We have started paying 93 per cent of the workers through banks now and will soon introduce a biometric system for attendance," said DMRC GM (Civil) Surya Prakash. However, guards, sweepers, Acme Enterprises, A2Z Securities, and even workers hired by Prehari Security Services as guards outside the DMRC office in Connaught Place said they still do not have PF or ESIC accounts and contractors continue to pilfer over a fourth of their wages this way. Documents obtained through Right to Information (RTI) applications showed that Keshav Security Services, a company similar to Bedi & Bedi, and also the largest supplier of housekeepers to DMRC, allotted two different PF account numbers to workers in 2009 and 2010. Calculating PF contributions at the rate of the 24 per cent of Rs. 7254 per month, the minimum wage for unskilled workers, about Rs. 1.26 crore is siphoned off in a year from just 607 employees. "The company keeps two accounts — one for DMRC records and a separate register where they keep our accounts. I have worked here for eight years since the Metro started, but never heard of anyone getting their PF funds," said a worker who took part in the strike at 11 stations on the Blue Line on October 13. (The Hindu 23/10/2012)

#### **Cases against seven for misuse of MNREGA funds (14)**

DAVANGERE: The Jagalur police have registered criminal cases against seven persons, including a former president of the gram panchayat, for alleged misuse of funds under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) and violation of guidelines while executing some schemes at Donnehalli in Jagalur taluk. B. Siddappa, in-charge executive officer of the taluk panchayat, had stated in his police complaint that a sum of Rs. 16.31 lakh had been misappropriated under the MNREGA between 2009-10 and 2011-12. Based on the complaint, the police registered criminal cases against K. Gurumurthy, former president of the gram panchayat; Mallikarjunappa, former panchayat development officer; Rudrappa, panchayat development officer; Rajanna, secretary; and Hanumanthappa, an employee of the gram panchayat. In addition, cases have been registered against a social forestry officer and his deputy. Earlier, alleging that crores of rupees had been misused under the MNREGA in Donnehalli, members of the Akhil Bharat Kisan Sabha had staged dharnas in Jagalur and Davangere. They had written to S.V. Ramachandra, Jagalur MLA, to urge the government to institute a high-level inquiry. Following a request from Mr. Ramachandra, the Department of Panchayat Raj and Rural Development sent a team to Donnehalli on August 24 and 25 to inspect the schemes that were under way. The team, according to sources, recommended to the government to recover Rs.16.31 lakh from the seven accused persons and also get criminal cases booked against them. (The Hindu 26/10/12)

#### **Audit reveals financial lapses in jobs scheme implementation in M.P.(14)**

Bhopal: Various financial irregularities have been found in the implementation of the country's flagship MNREGS in many districts of Madhya Pradesh, according to an audit report. The report on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme accounts for 2010-11, submitted to the State Government in August, reveals financial discrepancies worth crores of rupees by the district in-charges. "In the audited account of 2010-11 of district office of Chhindwara, we have noted that balance of opening advance Rs 12,85,000 and closing advance Rs 6,41,000 has been shown in balance sheet. But transactions were not reflected in the receipt and payment account," the audit report, accessed by RTI activist Ajay Dubey, mentions. The report noted that Sidhi and Alirajpur district office auditor has made adjustment worth about Rs 54 crore of opening grant (for current year 2010-11) which needs confirmation. In Alirajpur, an adjustment of over Rs 1.53 crore and in Sidhi about Rs 54 crore needs confirmation from concerned auditors, it said. The report found that grant-in-aid given by the Central government through National Rural Employment Guarantee Council to the State and districts had not

been reconciled in eight districts with crores of rupees unaccounted for. It found discrepancies of about Rs 31 lakh in Bhind, Rs 56 lakh in Jabalpur, Rs 1.29 crore in Khandwa, Rs 35 lakh in Mandsaur, Rs 97 lakh in Rajgarh, Rs 66 lakh in Seoni, Rs 1 crore in Khargone and Rs 6.94 crore in Singrauli. MNREGS was launched in 2005 to guarantee employment of minimum 100 days to people living below the poverty line. State Rural and Panchayat Development Minister Gopal Bhargawa said strict action was taken against those found involved in any sort of wrongdoings. "We have taken action against senior officials. Some IAS officers, who were collectors of some districts, have also been punished. We take strict action against anyone found involved in any sort of wrongdoings," Bhargawa told PTI. The consolidated audit report, which is a part of a mandatory obligation under the MNREG Act, was prepared on the direction of Madhya Pradesh Government by a chartered accountant chosen through open tendering. The report was made on the basis of accounts maintained by district auditors for monitoring implementation of MNREGS. "We have noted that in district Barwani, statutory audit report arithmetically totalling error amounting Rs 51.42 lakh exist in receipt and payment account...despite repetitive reminders to the council authorities, this difference could not be patched up," it said. The auditor found that district statutory report was not being maintained in uniformity. In 16 districts the 60:40 ratio between labour and material was not being maintained. "There are serious irregularities in the implementation of MNREGS in the State. We demand CBI enquiry on all irregularities," Dubey said. Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, financial discrepancies in MNREGS, financial irregularities in implementation of MNREGS, (Business Line 29/10/12)

#### **CITU holds protest demanding hike in daily wage of menial workers (14)**

BERHAMPUR: Ganjam district unit of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) held a demonstration in front of the office of the Commissioner of Labour Department in the city on Wednesday. They protested against recent hike in minimum daily wage of menial workers in Odisha, which according to them was insufficient to meet day-to-day need of any family. These agitators were led by president of district unit of CITU Ram Chandra Nayak. They also handed over a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister of Odisha at the labour office. It may be noted that State government had recently increased minimum daily wage of menial workers in Odisha to Rs. 150 per day. But according to CITU activists this amount was too meagre to meet the day-to-day needs of family of a menial worker during this time of extreme price rise. The CITU activists also alleged that the minimum daily wage in Odisha was less in comparison to minimum daily wage in several other States of the country. As per the CITU a menial worker should get at least Rs. 10,000 per month to run his family. To provide this amount to the workers the minimum daily wage had to be increased to Rs. 335 per day, they said. The agitators also demanded the State government to initiate measures for job security of numerous workers in unorganised sector. They also took up issues related to construction workers and demanded issue of identity cards, health insurance cards, BPL cards and other prescribed amenities to this large labour force of the State. They alleged that although the construction workers' welfare board in Odisha had around Rs. 90 crore with it, disbursement of money to the needy workers through claims related to death, injury and emergency loans by registered construction workers was not satisfactory. (The Hindu 1/11/12)

#### **State unions welcome Cabinet amendment to labour law (14)**

Ahmedabad: The state's major labour unions have welcomed the Union Cabinet's nod to an amendment to a law concerning unorganised construction workers. The Cabinet on Thursday scrapped a contentious rule that required workers to prove their having worked at construction sites for at least 90 days before becoming eligible for benefits provided by the Building and Other Construction Workers' (BOCW) Act, 1996. The amendment, which will be presented before Parliament for final implementation, has also made it mandatory for government agencies to transfer cess money — collected from builders and workers under the law — to a welfare board within one month. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) had in this year's audit report rapped the state government for having hoarded Rs 339 crore and not transferring it to a welfare board charged with disbursing the law's welfare benefits. "This is good news. We have fought for years for this change, and it has finally happened," said Manali Shah, national council secretary of the Swashrayi Mahila Seva Sangh (SMSS), over phone from an international trade union meet in Jordan. The SMSS, which has a membership of over seven lakh construction workers in the state, had lost a case in the Gujarat High Court in July. The union had demanded that registered unions be allowed to certify workers who have completed 90 days work at construction sites. Bandhkam Mazdoor Sangathan's general secretary Vipul Pandya said, "The amendment is good. The removal of the

90-day provision will pave the way for more registrations, but caution must also be exercised that non-construction workers do not get registered under this act." "The most important amendment relates to doing away with the requirement of proof of working for 90 days. This is a welcome step. As no employer gives proof of employment, the workers were unable to get registered. It is hoped that doing away with this requirement will now allow tens of thousands of workers to be register themselves," Majdoor Adhikar Manch, another union, said in a statement. The other amendment, which has set a time limit of 30 days for cess money collected from workers and construction firms, appears particularly relevant for Gujarat. The CAG had this year rapped the state government for sitting on more than Rs 300 crore worth of collected cess for more than six years. (Indian Express 2/11/12)

#### **Alang worker's death: Environment activist writes to Modi (12)**

AHMEDABAD: Expressing concerns over working conditions at Alang ship-breaking yard, Toxics Watch Alliance (TWA) convener, Gopal Krishna has written a letter to chief minister Narendra Modi. Krishna's letter comes days after six workers were burnt to death while dismantling a ship at Alang. Another worker injured during the incident succumbed to death last week. The letter says, "During your tenure from 2001 to 2012, there have been at least 173 deaths (of workers at Alang) without anyone being made accountable or liable. The migrant workers, mostly non-Gujaratis, who are routinely dying on Alang beach do not appear to be your concern." The activists has said that these occupational deaths routinely happen at Alang and nothing been done to save the lives of these workers. "Government has failed to ensure that the guilty officials and ship breakers are made accountable. In the context of the recent deaths if you were sensitive you would have ensured that no deaths happen in future by re-opening the old cases of occupational deaths on the Alang beach to set matters right," he says in the letter. He says that in 2011 alone, 27 workers died in ship-breaking activities at Alang beach. "Migrant casual workers live and work in a slave like condition. A UN report states that health facilities in Alang/Sosiya do not possess sufficient human, technical and financial resources to provide any treatment other than first aid for minor injuries. The nearest equipped hospital is in Bhavnagar, 50 kms away," the letter says. -- Make Smarter Career Decisions. Find out which company, role and industry is right for you. Visit [jobbuzz.timesjobs.com](http://jobbuzz.timesjobs.com) to find out. Get company reviews and ratings, salary details, interview information, interview questions and more  
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#### **Union Cabinet clears amendments to benefit 88 lakh construction workers (14)**

NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet has cleared major amendments in the law relating to construction workers that would benefit over 88.10 lakh of them. Talking to The Hindu here after the meeting, Union Labour & Welfare Minister Mallikarjun Kharge said the salient features of the amendments include removing the clause that construction workers should have worked a minimum of 90 days to register with the labour welfare boards set up in various States; and doing away with the upper age limit of 60 years for availing of benefits under the scheme. The amendments approved by the Cabinet to the Building & Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996, and the Building & Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996, would be legalised by tabling a Bill in this regard in the winter session of Parliament, Mr. Kharge said. The amendments would facilitate speedy implementation of these Acts by the Central and State governments, he added. The changes also seek to empower State governments to file complaints for any contravention of provisions. As per estimates of the National Sample Survey (2009-10), there are about 4.46 crore building and other construction workers but only less than 25 per cent of them have registered themselves with the Welfare Boards to enjoy benefits. (The Hindu 4/11/12)

#### **Centre to link NREGA wages to state's minimum wages: Jairam Ramesh (14)**

The Centre was considering a proposal to equate the wages for works under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act with the minimum wages prevailing in states, Union Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh today said. "There are some states where the wages under NREGA are lower

than the state-level minimum wages. The Union Government proposed to amend Section 6 (1) of NREGA to equate the wages with the state minimum wages," Ramesh told reporters here. A case on the issue had been pending in the Supreme Court and the government, after finalising its proposal, would inform the apex court of its decision, Ramesh said. Even under the existing rules, NREGA wages were revised every year in April and equated with minimum wages every five years, he said. Kerala, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Mizoram, Uttarkhand and Jharkand are the states where the minimum wages are higher than the NREGA wages, he said. In Kerala, the NREGA wage is Rs164 while the minimum wage is Rs200, he said. (DNA 6/11/12)

### **Centre mulls revising wage structure of MGNREGS (14)**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The centre is actively considering amending the wage structure of the flagship rural employment guarantee scheme following complaints from states like Kerala where the minimum wage is much more than what is being given under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme ( MGNREGS). "Six states are facing this peculiar problem where the minimum daily wage is around Rs 200 but under MGNREGA the daily wage is Rs 164," Union rural development minister Jairam Ramesh told TOI. He said that Centre is now planning to amend section 6(1) of the MGNREGA so that wages can be linked to the market. The constitutional amendment to the act will legally establish the MGNREGA wage rate as an independent wage rate delinked from the minimum rate fixed by the states. "The case is also being contested in the Supreme Court and we hope to settle the issue amicably," he said. According to social demographers, in a country which hardly provides any social welfare umbrella for people working in the unorganized sector, the MGNREGA has come as a boon for many households where men had stopped doing manual labour due to medical reasons or alcohol abuse. "We are seeing a huge change in the attitude of people. Plenty of women are coming to work in the fields," a senior state official said. More than economic cost it is the long term social cost that should be taken into consideration, he added. A study conducted by the ministry of rural development and funded by UNDP showed that a majority of workers registered under NREGA have participated in works like road connectivity (56.4%), flood control and protection (35.5%). , cleaning of irrigation canals and channels (26.6%), renovation of traditional water bodies (22.6%) and water conservation and harvesting (19.4%). "The work sites are within a 5km radius of the place of residence of households, and 95% of the workers are able to walk to work. Basic facilities are made available at the work site, however, most workers feel that the facilities are inadequate," the study showed. In the last few years, a majority of blocks in Kerala have been facing acute labour shortage. , be it in plantation, tapioca or coconut farms. Around 90% of land owners here have agriculture land below five acres, but many have stopped farming due to high labour cost. "The potential of MGNREGA as a means of social transformation is huge and the state should provide basic sanitation facilities and tools to the workers," Ramesh said. The centre is actively considering amending the wage structure of the flagship rural employment guarantee scheme following complaints from states like Kerala where the minimum wage is much more than what is being given under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNRES). " Six states including Kerala is facing this peculiar problem where the minimum daily wages is around Rs 200 but under MGNREGA the daily wages is Rs 164, " Union rural development minister Jairam Ramesh told TOI. He said that centre is now planning to amend section 6(1) of the MGNREGA so that the wages can be linked to the market. The constitutional amendment to the act will legally establish the MGNREGA wage rate as an independent wage rate delinked from the minimum rate fixed by the states. "The case is also currently been contested in the supreme court and we hope to settle the issue amicably soon," he said. Social demographers said that in a country which hardly provides any social welfare umbrella for people working in the unorganized sector the MGNREGA has come as a boon for many households, where men had stopped doing manual labour due to medical reasons or alcohol abuse. "We are seeing a huge change in the attitude of people and more and more women are coming to work in the fields," a senior state official said. He said more than economic cost it is the long term social cost that should be taken into consideration. A study conducted by ministry of rural development and funded by UNDP showed that a majority of the workers registered NREGA have participated in works like road connectivity (56.4%), flood control and protection (35.5%), cleaning of irrigation canals and channels (26.6%), renovation of traditional water bodies (22.6%) and water conservation and harvesting (19.4%). "The worksites are within the radius of 5 km. from the place of residence of households. 95% cent of the workers are able to reach the work site by walking. Basic facilities are made available at the work site, however, majority of the workers felt that the facilities are inadequate like says lack to adequate toilet

facilities at the work sites," the study showed. In the last few years, a majority of blocks in Kerala, have been facing acute labour shortage, be it in plantation, tapioca and coconut farms. Around 90% of land owners here have agriculture land below five acres. But many had stopped farming because of high labour cost. "The potential of MGNREA as means of social transformation is huge and the state should provide basic sanitation facilities and tools to the workers," Ramesh said. (Times of India 6/11/12)

#### **Centre should release MGNREGS funds: CM to Union minister (14)**

BHOPAL: Chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has urged the Union government to release Rs 1,076 crore for payment to SC, ST and landless beneficiaries benefited in the state under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. In a letter to Union rural development minister Jairam Ramesh on Tuesday, Chouhan said that payment to labourers cannot be made since funds have not been made available by the Union government and new works are also not being started under the scheme. Referring to negative attitude of the Union rural development ministry towards the state, Chouhan said that the state government is committed to ensure that eligible beneficiaries under the scheme do not face any difficulty and get their dues in time. He said that Madhya Pradesh government is committed to implement the scheme in the best manner. (Times of India 7/11/12)

#### **NREGS casts shadow on paddy crop (14)**

HYDERABAD: A Reserve Bank of India (RBI) study on paddy cultivation in Andhra Pradesh has revealed that the UPA government's flagship program Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) is playing havoc with the paddy farmers in the state, mainly the small and marginal farmers. According to the study released in September, the rural job scheme has contributed to the spiralling cost of cultivation of rice and consequent reduction in the area of cultivation of the crop in the state. "The cost escalation has been primarily due to the increase in wage and input costs," the report, prepared by RV Ramana Murthy and Rekha Misra said. Mapping the genesis of the discouraging factors to paddy cultivation in the state, the 52-page report said because of MGNREGS, the bargaining power of labourers has gone up many folds in the past three years. Quoting farmers, the report said paddy cultivation was remunerative till the introduction of MGNREGS in 2007. Incidentally, farmers from the Telangana region responded to the increase in labour costs with increased mechanization. However, the ryots from the coastal districts continue to incur high labour costs in the absence of such substitution. In the three years spanning 2007-10, the cumulative growth of nominal wages was 91.3% for male workers and 102% for female labourers, the report said. Even in real terms, according to the study, the wages have risen for male and female labourers by 52 and 59% respectively during the study period. Buttressing its conclusion that there was a sharp rise in rural wages because of the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act in 2007-08 in the state, the report said: "When wage rates were low at Rs 150 and Rs 40 for male and female workers respectively, paddy farming used to leave some surplus revenue to tenant farmer, but once the wage rates have gone up to Rs 300 and Rs 125 (per day) for the same categories since 2007-08, the steep costs (35%) have overtaken the revenues," the study revealed. The problems of tenant farmers have been compounded by the higher rents which are the result of the fierce competition among them for the limited land available for lease. Another important trend observed by Ramana Murthy and Rekha Misra is that most of the landowners in the coastal region have diversified into non-agricultural activities. "Many have become commission agents, fertilizer dealers, money lenders, millers, etc. It is only the marginal and (some) small farmers who have remained in agriculture due to lack of alternative employment opportunities," the report said. However, on the contrary, in Telangana, farmers have overcome the growing cost problem by adopting modern techniques. "In Telangana, farmers have responded to wage rise by shifting to harvesters. Though grass worth Rs 1500 is lost in using harvester, they save a cost of around Rs 5000 per acre," the report said. The report felt that last year's crop holiday in East Godavari was the result of the crisis in the paddy cultivation. (Times of India 9/11/12)

#### **Only flexible labour laws will boost employment (14)**

Advice from World Bank chief economist Kaushik Basu - that India has to debate its labour laws and ensure greater flexibility - is timely given growing challenges on the labour front. India's labour force increases by as much as seven million each year. Twenty million young people are enrolled in higher education - a figure comparable to the United States. The more qualified workforce that will be created each year is unlikely to settle for careers in the unorganised sector, which currently accounts for 93% of

total employment in the country. The primary reason for such excessive dominance of the unorganised sector is the rigid and cumbersome labour laws, which employers circumvent by setting up much smaller informal units which fall outside the purview of the law. The impact on productivity has been disastrous, as productivity of workers at high-end manufacturing units in the formal sector can be as much as 20 times higher than in low-end informal units. Low productivity has not only pushed down both profits and wages but also deprived the workers of almost all social security benefits including pensions. It has shackled labour-intensive manufacturing, where growth has been sluggish even in a buoyant economy. Consequently manufacturing employment has even declined in the latter half of the last decade, going down from 52.7 million in 2004-05 to 48.06 million in 2009-10. Evidence from states shows that regions with stringent employment protection, or where dispute settlements are ineffective and costly, have much lower employment. So flexible labour laws which allows workforce adjustments in tune with production requirements, is the only option to boost employment and scale up the organised sector. (Times of India 14/11/12)

#### **16 categories of MNREGA works classified (14)**

Bhopal: The Centre has released a list of permissible works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Most of the new works made permissible by the Centre now are already being ensured in Madhya Pradesh through various sub-plans. In view of geographical conditions of the state, directives are being chalked out at the state-level implementation of new works for which directives do not exist. The 16 categories under which MNREGA works permissible as per the list released by the Union Rural Development Department include water conservation and collection, afforestation, plantation, works to prevent drought, minor irrigation, irrigation canals and facility and horticulture plantation. Other permissible works include land development and irrigation on IEL private land, de-silting from lakebeds, renovation of traditional water sources, land development, flood control, rural link roads, agricultural works pertaining to BNRGS, animal husbandry-related works, fisheries-related works, seashore works, rural drinking water and rural sanitation, an official release said. New work categories have been classified and new works included therein with a view to further boosting agricultural and rural livelihood activities and develop clean and healthy atmosphere for rural people by ensuring balance in rural environment. MNREGA Commissioner Ravindra Pastor has directed all the district collectors, district programme coordinators, CEOs and additional district programme coordinators to prepare shelf off projects for the works, which can be taken up under MNREGA. Mr Pastor has also directed to prepare labour budgets incorporating details of MNREGA works as MIS certificate. (new Kerala 14/11/12)

#### **Labour Department goes online (14)**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The Labour Department went online from Thursday, with majority of services now just a mouse click away. Inaugurating the modernisation drive of the department here on Thursday, Labour Minister Shibu Baby John said that the typical Malayalee mindset of viewing everything with an element of doubt ought to be changed, when there are lot of progressive things to be done. He said that from next year, wages and welfare benefits of workers would be distributed through banks. From now on, licences and registration under various labour Acts such as Inter-state Labour Act, Motor Transport Workers Act, Plantation Workers Act, Construction Labour Act and Kerala Shops and Commercial Establishments Act can be processed online. After verification of the application, the status will be informed through e-mail or sms. The registration and licence application have to be submitted through the website [lc.kerala.gov.in](http://lc.kerala.gov.in). K Muraleedharan MLA presided over the function. Labour Commissioner T T Antony and Additional Labour Commissioner V L Anilkumar also spoke at the function. (Indian Express 16/4/12)

#### **SEWA's Ela Bhatt to showcase her mentor's life (14)**

Ahmedabad: Founder of Self-Employed Women's Association Ela Bhatt will pay tribute to her mentor Anasuya Sarabhai by opening an exhibition on her life on the 40th anniversary of SEWA on Saturday, which also happens to be the late Sarabhai's birthday. Bhatt says that "Motaben" as Sarabhai was known, "inspired and influenced my vision of the labour movement and my work at SEWA" and her work has shaped the lives of 1.3 million self employed women in India. Long before Sarabhai had joined hands with Mahatma Gandhi to lead the historic strike of mill workers in Ahmedabad which led to the founding of Textile Labour Association in 1920, she had already led a successful strike by herself in 1917. SEWA was born of the TLA in 1972, the year in which Sarabhai passed away. The exhibition which will be on till

November 30, will be housed in Shantisadan in Mirzapur, where Sarabhai began her movement. (Indian Express 17/11/12)

#### **Work for labourers' welfare, activists urged (14)**

Bidar: Despite growth in the construction industry, the economic condition of construction workers remains pitiable, said High Court judge N.K. Patil here on Saturday. He was speaking at an awareness programme on the Construction and Other Labourers' Welfare Act. "Construction employs the largest number of labourers after agriculture in this country. In this way, it contributes significantly towards nation-building. However, few people tend to worry about the welfare of labourers. It is time we take notice of their woes," he said. He said that the Construction and Other Workers Welfare Board had several schemes for labourers' welfare. The board provides grants for free healthcare and accident relief, maternity benefits, education grants, children's marriage allowance, housing benefits, and other facilities. However, even though over 2 lakh labourers have registered with the board, only 10,350 have sought benefits from the board, he said. He urged activists to create awareness about the benefits among labourers. (The Hindu 18.11.12)

#### **'NREGS works worth Rs.119 crore taken up' (14)**

KARIMNAGAR: District Vigilance and Monitoring Committee chairman and Karimnagar MP Ponnambhakar asked officials to ensure that all Central government schemes are implemented effectively and that it benefits the beneficiaries. Addressing the district monitoring committee meeting here on Saturday, he informed officials to ensure that the government schemes reach the target groups at the village-level. Stating that the government had sanctioned 10,000 houses under Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) scheme, he said that they would sanction more houses if the authorities send the proposals. He also stressed the need to take up water harvesting structures under the BRGF programme in the district. Instructing officials to execute the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) works in a transparent manner, he also directed officials to deal firmly against officials involved in irregularities in the execution of works. He said that they had taken up works worth Rs.119 crore under NREGS during this year and added that they had also planted 74 lakh teak saplings under the scheme. Similarly, the MP also favoured plantation of toddy trees for the benefit of toddy tappers in the district under the NREGS programme. He also informed authorities to take up tank works which will benefit fishermen. Government Whip Arepalli Mohan asked authorities to complete the Sthree Shakthi buildings by December this year. *Peddapalli MP G. Vivekanand* asked the authorities to expedite the Indira Jala Prabha works and fix the drip irrigation schemes for the benefit of beneficiaries at the earliest. He also called upon officials to accord priority for the development of water harvesting structures to recharge the ground water table. Legislators Suddala Devaiah, L. Ramana, S. Satyanarayana, Collector Smita Sabharwal, Joint Collector H. Arun Kumar, Additional Joint Collector Sunder Abner and others were also present. (The Hindu 19/11/12)

#### **'17 percent of Indian working women face sexual harassment' (14)**

New Delhi: As many as 17 percent of working women in India have experienced sexual harassment at their workplace, according to a survey released Tuesday. The survey was conducted in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Durgapur by Oxfam India and the Social and Rural Research Institute. "About 17 percent of working women in India feel that they have experienced acts of sexual harassment at workplace, indicating a high incidence of sexual harassment among working women from both the organised and unorganised sectors," the survey found. Majority of women reported to have faced incidents that were non-physical. "Sixty-six of the 400 respondents reported to have faced a cumulative of 121 incidents of sexual harassment. 102 out of 121 incidents were reported to be non-physical, whereas the remaining 19 incidents were physical in nature," the survey said. While 87 percent of the general population and 93 percent of working women respondents reported awareness of sexual harassment of women at work place, a majority of the victims did not resort to any formal action against the perpetrator. Maximum number of sexual harassment cases was reported among labourers (29 percent), domestic helps (23 percent) and small-scale manufacturing units (16 percent). "Violence against women is a human rights violation, whether it is domestic violence within homes or sexual harassment at the workplace. We believe in the right of every woman to a violence free workplace," said Nisha Agrawal, chief executive officer, Oxfam India. Majority of respondents perceived women working in the unorganised sector to be more susceptible to sexual harassment due to lack of awareness of legislation. Interestingly, 26 percent reported to be the sole earning member of their families, indicating that

economic vulnerability further makes women more vulnerable to harassment at the workplace. Some of the reasons for not taking any such action were "fear of losing job", "absence of any complaints mechanism at the workplace", "fear of getting stigmatized", and "not aware of redressal mechanism". The survey also found that the Supreme Court guidelines on sexual harassment were known to as many as 17 percent of the respondents amongst the general population. It was found that awareness of the apex court guidelines was higher in metro cities - 24 percent as compared to other areas. "Although sexual harassment of women is a very sensitive issue, and off late has had a lot of prominence, most workplaces often fail to acknowledge sexual harassment as a concern. Overall, more than 80 percent of the respondents reported the need for a separate law for dealing with sexual harassment at work place," it added. The Lok Sabha in September had passed the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2012, and it is expected to come up for discussion in the Rajya Sabha in the ongoing winter session. (Deccan Herald 27/11/12)

#### **Migrant workers from Kerala being exploited: Ela Bhatt (14)**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Social activist Ela Bhatt has said that the domestic workers who migrated from Kerala are exploited very badly in other Indian states and it is the need of the hour that they are given adequate support. Bhatt was in the city to take part in the Pazhassi Raja commemoration organized by Pazhassi Raja Trust. "Many women who leave Kerala to work as home nurses in cities like Bhopal, Indore and Delhi have been working as house maids for years and are treated badly. Even though they call themselves as home nurses, they are treated worse than housemaids," Bhatt, the founder of Self Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) told TOI. She said that the language barrier creates communication problems with their employers. "We have been working to support them and have been fighting for their rights." SEWA has been focusing on uplifting domestic workers in India, especially in Kerala. "Our organization helps the women at grassroots level to realize their otherwise unfulfilled dreams. The government has yet to take any proactive action against problems faced by the self employed women. I believe that they should achieve economic freedom which would automatically empower them," she said. Bhatt said that SEWA was holding discussions with major bankers in the state to provide financial support to such self employed women. She also expressed her concern over the recent controversy surrounding Kudumbasree mission. Bhatt hoped that the government would lend its full support to Kudumbasree in the coming years. "Kudumbasree is a fantastic project. Statistics have been proving it for years. The workers have shown the way to women empowerment and stamped their achievement in various sectors like health, education and also in governance." (Times of India 30/11/12)

#### **'Laws governing unorganised sector should be removed' (14)**

ADILABAD: Just a small dose of economic liberalisation in favour of the large unorganised sector can make its greatly underprivileged constituents thrive and flourish. This is the belief which forms the core of the 'Agenda for bottom up economic reforms', being proposed by journalist-activist Madhu Kishwar. Ms. Kishwar heads the Manushi Sangathan of New Delhi which aims at revitalising legitimate traditional occupations besides arresting harassment of traditionally skilled artistes and artisans. The editor of Manushi magazine and champion of women's cause spoke to The Hindu on Saturday about the ills plaguing the unorganised sector, comprising mainly of the traditional productive classes such as artisans, artistes and farmers, and remedies thereof. She was here to participate in the Kala Vishwa Darshanam programme at the Kala Ashram which focussed on uplift of people with traditional skills., Ms. Kishwar's organisation will challenge through a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court all the legal clauses that are invoked by police in respective States to unnecessarily harass caste-based skilled communities. "Laws such as the one related with anti-beggary should not be applied when dealing with communities like the Nat trapeze artists," the activist opines. "These laws are used by police across the country to brutalise and demean such communities. Instead, the government should help them hone their traditional skills, as gymnasts in the case of the Nats," Ms. Kishwar demands. "Nothing should impede communities associated with production, like weavers and farmers, from fixing a price for their products on their own or hinder service providers like rickshaw pullers from free access to public space," the journalist says about the intent of the proposed economic reforms. "The laws governing the unorganised sector needs to be done away with for this," she adds. Another reason why Ms. Kishwar does not want the present legal clauses to be applied to the traditional caste-based communities is to protect their sense of self esteem and pride. "It is essential when we are talking of their upliftment," she observes. (The Hindu 2/12/12)

### **Women in unorganised sector work more, are paid less: Study (14)**

Mumbai: A first-of-its-kind study of the city's unorganised sector found that a 10% increase in wages pushes the women to put in 28% extra working hours. Of the women surveyed, 55% were domestic workers. The study also revealed that on an average, women — self-employed, casual or regular workers — work for 6.5 hours and earn Rs23 per hour (less than Rs19 in 50% cases) while men work for 10.4 hours and earn Rs31 per hour. Also, women heading households put in five to seven additional hours per day in order to sustain themselves. Conducted by Neeraj Hatekar, an economics professor at the University of Mumbai, Kishor More, a research associate at MU, and Abodh Kumar, a professor at Symbiosis Centre for Management and Human Resource Development, Pune, the survey says, "If men's wages increase faster than women's in the future, the labour hours supplied by women relative to men will fall." "In a global scenario, men have better chances to upgrade their skills and switch to higher wages," said Hatekar. The researchers insisted that it might be important to examine the possibility of a policy that allows women to eventually shift to more remunerative jobs. AL Sharda, director of Population First, an NGO which works for women's rights, said, "The trend is the same in the organised sector as well. Working women spend many hours taking care of households; this goes unrecognised. It drains them physically, mentally and emotionally." (DNA 3/12/12)

### **Special drive launched to get labourers registered (14)**

PUNE: Construction workers who do not register themselves with the labour department are not eligible to get any benefits of the welfare board set up for them by the government. A case in point is the death of eight workers at a construction site at Taljai Pathar in Sahakarnagar where an unauthorized building collapsed in September. The Bandhkam Mazdoor Sabha, an organization working for the welfare of construction labourers, in association with the labour department, has initiated a special drive to create awareness among the workers, and get them registered with the department. Ratnadeep Hendre, additional labour commissioner, Pune region, said that in cases where there have been accidents involving construction workers, the benefits of the Maharashtra building and other construction welfare board cannot be given to them if they are not registered with the board. It has been a year since the drive for registration of workers has started, he added. The board provides monetary assistance for better education of construction workers' children, stipend for skilled development of the workers, assistance for building house, and assistance up to Rs 1 lakh for any serious injury. In the event of death of a worker, the family gets assistance of Rs 1,000 per month for five years. Of the 11 people who died in the building collapse at Taljai Pathar, eight were construction workers, said Nitin Pawar, secretary of the Bandhkam Mazdoor Sabha. "The sabha, along with activist Baba Adhav, made a plea to the government to give the benefits of the welfare board to the families of the deceased workers. The labour department has forwarded the case to the government." "While the sabha is hoping that their plea will be considered positively by the government, Pawar said special awareness drives are being held in areas where construction workers live. The Shaheen Friends Circle is also helping the sabha in the registration drive. Each worker has been asked to take a pledge that he himself will register and also ask other workers to register. "Of the estimated two lakh construction workers in Pune district, about 20,000 workers have been registered with the labour department," Pawar said, adding that around 40,000 registrations have taken place in the state. The low awareness among the workers and their migration from place to place are some of the hurdles in registration. The higher number of registrations in Pune district has been possible only because the sabha took special efforts, along with the builders and developers associations, Pawar said. One of the conditions for registration is that the developer or the contractor has to give a certificate to the worker saying that s(he) has worked for 90 days, Pawar said. A construction worker should be registered immediately after he starts working, he said. (Times of India 4/12/12)

### **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act row sets assembly on fire, again (14)**

PATNA: The uproar in Bihar assembly over the alleged Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) scheme scam continued for the second consecutive day on Tuesday when the entire opposition stalled the proceedings of the House and the Speaker was forced to adjourn the assembly thrice, twice in pre-lunch session and later when the House assembled after lunch. The penultimate day of the short winter session of the assembly remained disturbed due to pandemonium that started the moment Speaker Uday Narayan Choudhary took his seat. The opposition members, who, on Monday, had demanded CBI probe into the alleged Rs 6,000 crore scam in MNREGA as reported by a Delhi-based NGO after its survey in 10 districts' 2,500 dalit hamlets, continued to press their demand on

Tuesday as well. Leader of opposition Abdul Bari Siddiqui and others had forcefully demanded CBI inquiry which was later rejected by the government on Monday. They had staged a walkout during the reply of rural development minister Nitish Mishra on Monday. On Tuesday, the opposition members disrupted the question hour. Its members trooped into the well of the House and shouted slogans. Despite that, the Speaker went ahead with question hour, though nothing was audible, and then adjourned the House for the first time till 12.30pm. A similar scene was witnessed when the assembly reassembled after the adjournment and somehow the Speaker carried on with zero hour and took up call attention notices and then again adjourned the House till 2pm. The third adjournment came when the House took up debate on the supplementary budget and due to acrimonious scene, the proceeding was adjourned till 4.30pm. Later in the evening, the opposition legislators led by Siddiqui went to Raj Bhavan to submit a memorandum to governor Devanand Konwar demanding a CBI inquiry into the alleged irregularities in the Centre's flagship rural job scheme. (Times of India 5/12/12)

#### **“Pay garment workers minimum wage of Rs. 12,096 per month” (14)**

Bangalore: The minimum wage fixed by the State government for a highly skilled garment worker in Bangalore, at Rs. 179.80 a day, is less than half of what he or she needs for subsistence as per the calculations made by the Asian Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA), based on realistic daily expenses. AFWA, a world-wide coalition of union leaders and labour activists, has arrived at a minimum living wage of Rs. 12,096 a month based on the food costs for intake of 3,000 calories per unit, non-food costs on housing, healthcare, education and other basic needs. Jeroen Merk, member of the international committee of the AFWA, who was in Bangalore recently, told The Hindu that the alliance arrived at the figure taking into account the actual market price of a food basket and other expenses at average costs and then projecting it for 30 days for three consumption units, with two children counted as one unit. In comparison, the National Floor Level Minimum Wage (NFLMW) is fixed by different States in India by taking into account 2,700 calories while not counting for the prevailing market prices of food items and services. Though the Supreme Court, in 1992, delivered a judgment which said that children's education, medical requirement, minimum recreation and provision for old age should be factored in while fixing minimum wages in all employments, this has not happened. All Left-affiliated unions have long been demanding that the government should fix Rs. 10,000 as minimum wage a month for unorganised workers, which has not been met. While much has been said about how multi-national apparel brands (which outsource production to countries, including India and Bangladesh) can play a role in ensuring decent wages and working conditions, Mr. Merk says that a reality check points to a situation to the contrary. Though social auditing in labour standards emerged in the 1990s and global sourcing companies started to adopt the code of conduct, Mr. Merk says that they tend to be “superficial snapshots” that have failed to ensure living wages to workers. He links this failure to the dynamics of brand pricing internationally, which contradicts the so-called “ethical standards” that the brands talk about. (The Hindu 6/12/12)

#### **Impoverished at home, endangered elsewhere (14)**

The reports of torture to migrant labourers from the State in other parts of the country have been pouring in. In yet another incident related to, deaths of Vishal Manghi and Harinarayan Ganghu (migrant labourers) have spread a shock wave among other such labourers and villagers who were forced to migrate to other parts in search of employment. The duo was a resident of Arjooa and Ordana panchayat of Peterwar block in Bokaro district and had been working for a tower construction company at Maharashtra. They fell down from a height of more than 30 feet and died, said Raju Manjhi, a villager. Despite those accidental deaths followed by the release of 19 impoverished and immiserised workers who were enslaved by a construction firm in Mangalore (Karnataka), migrations are on rise in search of employment to the other States. Few months earlier with the intervention of the police 19 workers including two children were rescued from the captivity of Manglor-based Construction Company who kept them as 'bonded labourers' reveals the horror of the captivity. Hard hit with this mayhem of unemployment about 83 youths from Peterwar block migrated to Goa in July and another group of 50 villagers left in August this year,” said Kisku, a villager. The youths migrated to Goa are Mukund Ghatwar, Ramlal, Anand, Bhola, Sukhlal, Shanker, Sudhir, Manoj, Sajtosh, Anil, Teklal Rajwar, Suraj, Vinod, Vijay Rai, Ravi, Permashwar, Jeetlal, Sonu Singh, Vikash, Bashant, Lakhindra, Madan, Prakahs, Shanti including others to join job in Ulka and Atlas Fisheries at Rs 3,000 to 5,000 monthly wages, he said. Recounting his horror of captivity, Amresh (a Dhanbad youth) narrated his sordid tale: this was just the beginning of their horror. Later when a labourer failed to work hard and became weak, they started

extracting his blood which they used to sell to the blood banks or hospitals". Ameresh was in captivity for seven years at a pig iron factory in Ludhiana district of Punjab. Luckily he succeeded in escaping and reached his residence at Bhaura in Dhanbad in April this year. He was made 'captive' in 2005 by the factory officials. Every morning, they toil hard for a working day lengthening for more than 18 hours. "And when we asked for our wages, we were snubbed and abused," he said. "He has become extremely malnourished and his condition is heart-rending. He can hardly speak and has forgotten most of the things. He cannot even recall the name of the factory where he had been made captive for last seven years," his brother Jitendra Kumar said. Amid nature's unlimited bounties and blessings, development is still to reach every corner of the State. With no alternative, peoples residing in the villages of Jharkhand are migrating to other States in search of employment to meet their both end needs. (Pioneer 7/12/12)

#### **NREGS personnel plea (14)**

ELURU: The supervisory personnel attached to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) on Friday sought safeguards from the audits by the Social Audit Committees on MNREGS works executed under their supervision. The audit committees were constituted with stakeholders from the local community. This plea came up for a discussion at a review meeting convened by Social Welfare Minister Pitani Satyanarayana here on Friday. A Mandal Parishad Development Officer from Mogalturu highlighted the need for reconstitution of the social audit committees with members having some technical expertise on the quality of works. (The Hindu 8/12/12)

#### **Law for same work, same pay for workers on the anvil (14)**

New Delhi: Government plans to enact a law to deal with issues related to proper implementation of same work, same pay for workers, especially those on contract or belonging to unorganised sector, Labour Minister Mallikarjun Kharge said on Monday. He, however, said there were problems in implementation of same work, same pay for contract workers. "There are issues and we are making efforts to deal with them. I have written to the states and have also raised this issue in the labour conferences. Unfortunately, many states do not make the required effort. My suggestion is to bring an amendment bill to deal with these issues," Kharge said in the Lok Sabha. He said during Question Hour that all stakeholders, including trade unions and state governments, will be consulted before the amendment bill is brought. He informed the House that the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, applies to contract labourers and in the unorganised sector and the average establishment employing them has to comply with the labour laws. "In the central sphere, in case of non-payment of wages fixed by the respective authorities, complaints can be made in the field offices of Chief Labour Commissioner," he said, adding that a total of 3,634 convictions had taken place in 2011-12. (Zee News 10/12/12)

#### **States fail to spend Rs 30,000 crore allocated for rural schemes (14)**

NEW DELHI: Even as the government promised to dole out Rs 99,000 crore for such schemes in the current fiscal, the states have failed to utilize nearly Rs 30,000 crore meant for various flagship programmes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act ( MGNREGA). "In 2012-13, about Rs 99,000 crore are being given to the states for rural development programmes. The responsibility for spending money on these programmes is entirely on state governments," the rural development minister Jairam Ramesh said in Rajya Sabha. Responding to a Parliament question, Ramesh said Rs 10,993 crore remained unspent under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and Rs 5,859 crore under Indira Aawas Yojana (IAY) last fiscal. Besides, Rs 8,919 crore could not be utilised under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana ( PMGSY) and Rs 3,987 crore under Integrated Watershed Management Programme in 2011-12. "The Central government provides the funds for rural development programmes which are broadly defined to include water supply and sanitation," he said. Ramesh said, "There are very many practical problems in the field. I accept the point that we must work with the state governments to help them expand and improve their capacity to spend money. There is no shortage of money. "There is no shortage of resources. But the real problem is in the ability of the states to spend money, particularly in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal on some programmes. "Largely in central and eastern India, the administrative and technical capacity to spend money quickly in a transparent and accountable manner needs to be strengthened," he said. The minister said he was working with state governments to ensure that "this happens sooner rather than later". (Times of India 11/12/12)

### **Door-step banking a boon for NREGA workers (14)**

Dukli, Tripura: Door-step banking, made possible by the introduction of electronic fund management system, has enabled faster payment of NREGA wages to workers in Tripura's rural areas. Earlier, an NREGA labourer had to wait for 15 to 20 days to receive the payment, but now he gets his dues as soon as his work is finished, state Rural Development Minister Jiten Chowdhury said. "Different bank executives during the introduction of the electronic fund management system (EFMS) had assured that they would open micro-ATMS before all Gaon Panchayat so that the NREGA workers could withdraw their money at any time," Chowdhury said. Micro-ATM is a device carried by "Business Correspondents", appointed by banks, which can identify the beneficiary by using biometrics like rubbing of fingers on the device if his credentials are inserted in the device. Incidentally, Tripura earned the Excellence Award for implementation of MGNREGA In 2008-09. Chowdhury claimed that under the scheme Tripura government provided 86 man-days per person in one year even as the rate of giving jobs in other states on an average is 54 days. The minister said at least 22 crore job cards for MGNREGA were supposed to be issued in the country whereas in reality only 12 crore cards were issued. The result of it is that the number of rural people were increasing day by day. Tripura is the only state where more than 90 per cent of the population are covered by the Aadhar scheme. The Tripura government first introduced Aadhar-enabled payment system in old age pension on October 18, 2012 at Borakha village in West Tripura district. (Indian Express 14/12/12)

### **Government to review EPF circular on salary, allowances (14)**

NEW DELHI: You can breathe easy with the government reviewing a circular issued by the Employee Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) that had asked employers to deduct the subscription from the gross salary, including allowances, a move that would have reduced the take-home salary of over 5 crore workers. A senior labour ministry official said there was a "rethink" on the circular that was issued on November 30, although a final decision is yet to be taken. The official added that the circular did not actually change the rules and had not clarified which allowances needed to be included in the calculation of basic wage. The circular was meant to ensure that employers did not shirk their responsibility, the official added. Officials said the circular was largely meant to protect employees earning below Rs 6,500 per month (for whom EPF is mandatory). In such instances, there have been cases where employers have split up the basic wage into various allowances, so as to reduce its contribution to the EPF. It is not mandatory for those earning above Rs 6,500 per month to opt for the EPF, but once employees opt for EPF, there is no opting out of it till the amount is withdrawn in full. Many employers expressed reservations after TOI first reported it on Tuesday as the circular would impact their wage bills. Typically, high salaried employees in the private sector do not opt for EPF. Employees have to contribute 12% of their basic wage towards PF and the amount is matched by their employers. The issue of employers shrinking the size of the basic wage and inflating allowances to reduce their PF burden has long plagued the EPFO. Both employers and trade unions objected after TOI first reported about it on Tuesday. "We have sent a letter to the labour ministry objecting to certain provisions in the circular," D L Sachdev, AITUC national secretary and trade union representative in the Central Board of Trustees of the EPFO, said. The consent of the CBT was not taken before issuing the circular, Sachdev added. Besides, in a note, consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers pointed to conflicting judgments on the subject. "Recently, the Madhya Pradesh high court ruled that allowances that are given universally, necessarily and ordinarily to all employees form part of the basic salary. The judgment has been challenged in the Supreme Court and the matter is yet to be decided. The decision of the SC would perhaps provide a direction in the matter but till then, this circular is a wake-up call for the employers to review their position in relation to compensation structure," it said. (Times of India 15/12/12)

### **Govt plans labour congress to settle industry disputes (14)**

The Mamata Banerjee government is planning a State Labour Congress to create a platform for workers and industries to exchange their views and settle disputes in the presence of government representatives. The move comes in the backdrop of militant trade unionism that reportedly compelled the ABG-led Haldia Bulk Terminal to wrap up its operations at Haldia Dock Complex. The chief minister has repeatedly claimed that loss of mandays has dropped because of a drastic fall in strikes and lockouts, but the industrial community is concerned over the fate of industrialisation because of Mamata's hands-off land policy and alleged collection of extortion money by trade unions, which are mostly controlled by the ruling Trinamool Congress in some industrialised parts of the state. Labour Minister Purnendu Basu said, "The

National Labour Congress is held by the Centre every year but there was no such initiative from the earlier state government to hold a similar event in the state. We are planning a State Labour Congress to create a friendly environment to enable industrialists' and workers' representatives to hold discussions freely. The event is likely to be held in January. The venue has not been finalised," Basu told The Indian Express. Union labour ministry officials and chambers of commerce and industries will also be invited to the meeting. Asked about problems the industrial units are facing, Basu said: "Mostly they want to amend certain clauses of labour-related laws. They have also been facing land-related problems. We will discuss all these problems in a conducive environment." (Indian Express 18/12/12)

#### **Trade union activists protest against anti-people policies (14)**

Udhagamandalam: Over 450 supporters including 151 women owing allegiance to various trade unions were arrested in various parts of the district on Tuesday for participating in picketing demonstrations in protest against the anti-people policies of the government. Their demands included steps to control price rise and measures to implement labour laws without dilution in any form. A social security scheme exclusively for workers in the unorganised sector should be implemented. Sale of shares in central and state public sector undertakings should be stopped forthwith. Contract workers should not be employed for jobs of a permanent nature. The wages of contract workers should be on par with those of the permanent staff. The Minimum Wages Act should be amended to ensure that every employee gets a sum of at least Rs. 10,000 a month. In paying bonus or contributing to the Provident Fund there should not be eligibility norms. Pension should be given to all categories of employees. (The Hindu 19/12/12)

#### **Waste pickers to come under social security (14)**

Bangalore: In a decision that could bring cheers to the lives of nearly 15,000 rag-pickers in the City, the Karnataka government is going to introduce 'Hasanmukhi Jeevana' scheme to give social security to them, besides offering training to generate money out of garbage through segregation. Dr Shalini Rajneesh, Principal Secretary to the Department of Public Administration and Reforms said the proposal to introduce the scheme was sent to the Central government, which gave its approval. She said the self-employed rag-pickers have been doing their work for ages, but they never had any recognition. Because of their contribution in segregating waste, at least 600 tonnes to 800 tonnes of waste did not go to the landfill sites. Also they save Rs 13 lakh of the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike, which the civic agency would have paid for segregating waste, said Dr Rajneesh. Now, the BBMP, along with the State government, has launched a drive to identify the rag-pickers. (Deccan Herald 20/12/12)

#### **'Job security not ensured to unorganised sector' (14)**

Chikkaballapur: Communist Party of India (Marxist) State Secretary G V Srirama Reddy on Sunday alleged that the Union and State Governments were wasting time by making mere promises that they would take steps to ensure job security to workers in the unorganised sector. Addressing the second Chikkaballapur district convention of CITU, Reddy said that crores of people were without job security and, the Centre and State had failed to implement programmes to address the problem. "Scores of people were working on contract basis and were not getting even minimum wages. In fact, minimum wages has remained only on paper," he said. Contract labourers were being made to work beyond stipulated hours and the employers were exploiting them by not paying wages in accordance with their work. The State government has not regularised the services of anganawadi workers and assistants and, instead was paying them honorarium in the range of Rs 4,000 to Rs 5,000 which was insufficient to lead a decent life, Reddy said. Addressing the convention, CITU State Secretary Varalakshmi said that CITU and other organisations have called for a Bharat bandh on February 20 and 21 to protest against the proposed foreign direct investment in public sector under-takings. Support of various right-wing organisations and trade unions would be sought for the proposed two-day bandh, she said. (Deccan Herald 23/12/12)

#### **China amends labour laws to help temp workers (14)**

BEIJING: China amended its labour law on Friday to ensure that workers hired through contracting agents are offered the same conditions as full employees, a move meant to tighten a loophole used by many employers to maintain flexible staffing. Contracting agencies have taken off since China implemented the Labour Contract Law in 2008, which stipulates employers must pay workers' health insurance and social security benefits and makes firing very difficult. "Hiring via labour contracting agents

should be arranged only for temporary, supplementary and backup jobs," the amendment reads, according to the Xinhua news agency. It takes effect on July 1, 2013. Contracted labourers now make up about a third of the workforce at many Chinese and multinational factories, and in some cases account for well over half. Some foreign representative offices, all news bureaus and most embassies are required to hire Chinese staff through employment agencies, rather than directly. Although in theory contracted workers are paid the same, with benefits supplied by the agencies who are legally their direct employers, in practice many contracted workers, especially in manufacturing industries and state-owned enterprises, do not enjoy benefits and are paid less. Employment agencies have been set up by local governments and even by companies themselves to keep an arms-length relationship with workers. Workers who are underpaid, fired or suffer injury often find it very difficult to pursue compensation through agencies. Korean electronics giant Samsung Electronics said in November that it would require its 249 supplier factories in China to cap the number of temporary or contracted workers at 30 percent of regular full-time employees. It announced the corrective measure after Chinese labour activists reported violations of overtime rules and working conditions as well as underage workers at Samsung suppliers. Samsung says its own audit did not find workers under China's legal working age of 16. (Times of India 28/12/12)

### **Bengal to observe social security fortnight from tomorrow (14)**

KOLKATA: A social security fortnight would be observed in West Bengal from January 1 to January 15 next year to popularise various social security schemes for the unorganised sector initiated by the West Bengal government. "We want to make people aware of various welfare schemes introduced for the marginal and backward people of society engaged in different occupations in the unorganised sector," state labour minister Purnendu Bose said announcing the programme on Monday. Organised by the labour department, the fortnight would help people get detailed information on the schemes. Bose said for instance the fortnight would help people gather information on how provident fund and health security schemes for workers in the unorganised sector and social security schemes for construction and transport workers became more attractive. At present there are about one crore workers in the unorganised sector in the state and many of them have already registered themselves under these welfare schemes, Bose said. "If a beneficiary enlists his name at the age of 18 years and contributes Rs 25 against the state government's contribution of Rs 30 per month, at the age of 60 he will get Rs 2.5 lakh under the state-Assisted scheme of Provident Fund for Unorganised Workers (SASPFUW)", the minister said. While nearly 22 lakh workers were registered under this scheme (SASPFUW) during the 34-year rule of the LF Government, in the last 18 months the state government had registered nearly ten lakh unorganised sector workers registered under the scheme, he said. The minister said that out of 7.30 lakh total number of workers enrolled under Building and Other Construction Workers Act (BOCWA) as on November 30, 2012, a total of 4.58 lakh were enrolled only during the last 18 months of the present government for various benefits. While the erstwhile LF government spent Rs 1.56 crore in six years, the Mamata Banerjee government spent Rs 23.14 crore in only 18 months, the minister claimed. Similarly, under the schemes for transport workers, a total of 43,857 workers were enrolled during last 18 months rule of the present government for various benefits, which was against a total enrolled workers of 89,554 since the beginning of LF government in 1977, he said.... (Times of India 31/12/12)