

An Open Letter to the Prime Minister: Stop the Dilution of MGNREGA

Dear Prime Minister,

We are very disturbed by impending moves of this government to undermine the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the support it provides to crores of vulnerable rural families. We write this letter to seek your immediate assurance that these retrograde, anti-poor and anti-labour measures will be withdrawn, and that every attempt will be made by your government to implement the MGNREGA in its true spirit.

Based on recent public statements from Shri Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister of Rural Development, and other available information, we learn that the Central Government has initiated the following changes under MGNREGA:

- Restriction of NREGA to tribal/backward districts of the country through an amendment to the Act.
- Reduction of the minimum labour-material ratio from the current level of 60:40 to 51:49.
- Severely restricting the MGNREGA through a budget squeeze. There have been unprecedented communications by the Central Government to States capping MGNREGA expenditure for the rest of the financial year, undermining the fundamental principle of demand-driven employment.

These changes are inimical to the spirit of the Act and compromise its basic objectives. They will only benefit the contractor class and other middlemen, and severely undermine the employment generating potential of the MGNREGA. The changes are also being undertaken without any public consultation. The MGNREGA was passed unanimously by all parties and all members of Parliament. We fundamentally object to this critical social legislation being undermined through casual use of executive powers and even a parliamentary majority.

The illegal and unwarranted budget squeeze has led to widespread reports of employment rationing and acute delays in wage payments. Even as MGNREGA workers are struggling to be paid for work already done, the Central Government is sending the message that money is going to be further rationed.

The undersigned demand that your Government immediately revoke the above decisions and renounce any dilution of MGNREGA. We urge you to ensure that MGNREGA employment remains a legal right of every rural household across the country and that there is no dilution of any MGNREGA entitlements. The MGNREGA budget should be based on work demand, keeping with the spirit of the act, without any discretionary cuts.

Through this letter we also wish to convey our resolve to work together to protect the MGNREGA and defend the rights of MGNREGA workers.

With regards,

People's Action for Employment Guarantee and other concerned citizens

(List of signatories attached)

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113.	Justice Rajindar Sachar	
114.	Jyothi Krishnan	
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239.	Summa Josson	Filmmaker
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243.	Swami Agnivesh	
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266.	Women's Coalition For Change	
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