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MNREGS workers subsidised creation of infra assets by Rs 20,000 crore a year

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The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) may be seen as one that offers relief to the poor in distress, but those poor 'beneficiaries' are in fact subsidising the creation of

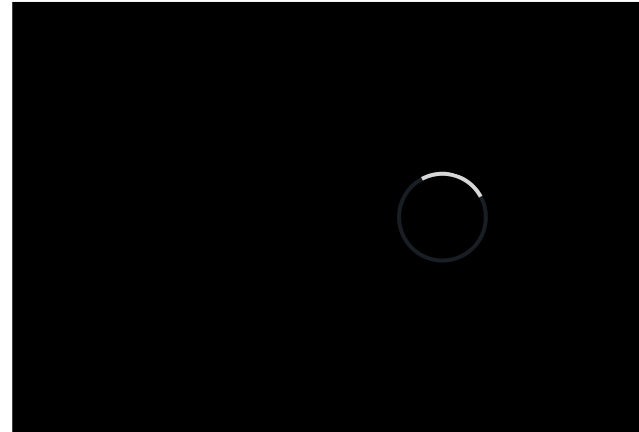
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infrastructural assets to the tune of over Rs 20,000 crore a year, an analysis of its wage bill suggests.

By paying MNREGS workers well under minimum wages, the government saved nearly Rs 42,000 crore in just the last two years, a period in which the poor faced severe economic distress due to Covid-induced disruptions.



The minimum wage ranges from Rs 441 in Karnataka to just Rs 201 in Uttar Pradesh. In almost no state were MNREGS workers paid the minimum wage, though it is supposed to be the barest minimum required for subsistence-level existence. The minimum wage fixation (itself disputed by experts) is done by considering the most basic nutritional intake for human survival. Time and again, the Supreme Court through several judgments has also elevated the right to minimum wages from a statutory status to constitutional status. The SC has also ruled that wages less than minimum wage amount to “forced labour”.

UNDERPAYMENT & EFFICIENCY				
State/UT	Minimum wage per day	Actual wage bill (Apr-Dec)	What it would be at minimum wages	Gap
Total for large states	NA	56,537	77,360	20,823

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Tamil Nadu	322	5,809	8,845	3,036
Rajasthan	252	5,898	8,079	2,180
Karnataka	441	3,821	5,937	2,115
West Bengal	268	5,923	7,934	2,011
Odisha	315	3,617	5,405	1,788
Telangana	306	2,259	4,007	1,747
Andhra	292	4,809	6,339	1,530
Bihar	292	2,360	3,481	1,120
MP	228	4,667	5,728	1,061
Jharkhand	315	2,093	2,929	835
Chhattisgarh	262	1,817	2,652	835
Kerala	410	2,042	2,839	796
Gujarat	310	936	1,425	488
Assam	298	1,375	1,831	456
Punjab	369	758	1,061	303
Himachal	300	551	817	265
Maharashtra	276	1,081	1,240	159
Uttarakhand	245	382	459	77
Haryana	377	359	433	74
J&K	225	504	530	26
UP	201	5,472	5,391	-80

Source: MNREGA website for employment generated, V V Giri National Labour Institute and state notifications for minimum wages (latest available)

Work under MNREGS is hard manual labour used for building rural infrastructure such as water conservation structures, roads, houses under [PM Awas Yojana](#) and land development. In effect, all of this is being subsidised by the poorest through their underpaid labour. TOI looked at data on person days of work generated under the scheme and calculated what the wage bill would have been at minimum wages. We then compared this to the wages actually paid to see how much was saved. We used the minimum wage for agricultural labour, typically the lowest of the minimum wages in each state, and where that was not available, the closest proxy.

The highest savings were in states which provided more person days of employment and had the highest minimum wages, while in those which provided hardly any work under MNREGS or have very low minimum wages, there was little or no saving. Thus, in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, which have

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among the highest minimum wages, the government saved the highest amounts of Rs 3,038 crore and Rs 2,115 crore in April-December 2021. Rajasthan and West Bengal have much lower minimum wages but generated more person days under the scheme and thus the savings in them was over Rs 2,000 crore each. Uttar Pradesh was the only state where the actual labour bill under MNREGS was higher, though only slightly, than the calculations at minimum wages. But then, UP has the lowest minimum wage rate for agricultural labour and has not revised them for the past two years.

Prof Ravi S Srivastava, director of the Centre for Employment Studies at the Institute for Human Development, pointed out that the total cost of providing appropriate wages would not be much, but the government has resisted an increase in MNREGS wages despite two of its own committees recommending it. "No justification has been provided for MNREGS wages not corresponding to legal minimum wages, but this has been a long standing practice. MNREGS is a very productive programme that creates basic rural infrastructure. In a crisis it makes sense to invest in short gestation period infrastructure which will be more labour intensive and can increase earning of workers. Studies going back 20 years have shown that this has a cascading effect on the economy by increasing demand. The notion that MNREGS is just a social scheme or that expenditure on the poor is relief expenditure is wrong. You are paying the poor to do very hard work and in the process creating rural assets/infrastructure," he said.

Government notifies revised MNREGS wages with effect from April 1 of every financial year after adjusting for changes in prices. According to a paper co-authored by Dr Anoop Satpathy, fellow at the V V Giri National Labour Institute, in 2006-07, the first year of implementation of the scheme, MNREGS wages were linked with the minimum wages notified by the state governments and varied from Rs

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50 in Gujarat to Rs 125 in Kerala. In 2007-08, 10 states revised minimum wages and demanded more funds from the central government, which foots the entire labour bill for the scheme. The paper argues that this upward revision was not unreasonable as the Minimum Wage Act of 1948 empowers states to revise minimum wages according to price indices.

The wage revision created apprehension that the scheme might become financially unsustainable in the long-run and the Congress government, which had promised 100 days of employment per year at Rs 100 per day under MNREGS, delinked wages in the scheme from minimum wages. It is another matter that the average number of days of employment actually ranges between 44 to 52 days over the last five years. Even the fixation at Rs 100 was done arbitrarily as in states where minimum wages were lower, the MNREGS rate was hiked to Rs 100 while for states like Goa, Haryana, Kerala and Mizoram, where minimum wages were above Rs 100, these were protected and wages notified under MNREGS were also higher.

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FCRA licence: Supreme Court denies relief to NGOs that failed to apply

TNN / Jan 26, 2022, 01:27 IST



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NEW DELHI: In a setback to 6,000 NGOs whose FCRA licences could not be renewed because of their failure to apply within the stipulated time period, the Supreme Court declined their pleas for continuation of their licences and asked them to make representation to the government.

A bench of Justices A M Khanwilkar, Dinesh Maheswari and C T Ravikumar turned down the plea for interim relief after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta informed the apex court that the NGOs were at fault themselves for not applying for renewal of the licences. He submitted that the government extended FCRA licences for 11,594 NGOs, which had applied for renewal, till their applications were decided and the same relief could not be given to those which failed to apply.

Taking note of the Centre's submission, the court said the aggrieved NGOs can make representation to the Centre, which will take the decision as per law.

The Supreme Court was hearing a petition filed by US-based NGO Global Peace Initiative, which has been founded by an Indian and works closely with many NGOs, including the

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The NGO, founded by Kilari Anand, pleaded to the apex court that NGOs played a very crucial and important role in reaching out to people and helped the country during the Covid-19 pandemic, which had been duly acknowledged by the government and the Prime Minister's Office itself. Cancellation of licences of close to 6,000 NGOs at this juncture would hamper relief efforts and lead to denial of aid to citizens in need, it said.

“The work done by these NGOs helped millions of Indians. The sudden and arbitrary cancellation of FCRA registration of thousands of these NGOs violates the rights of the organisations, their workers as well as the millions of Indians who they serve. This is especially relevant at a time when the country is facing the third wave of the Covid-19 virus,” it said.

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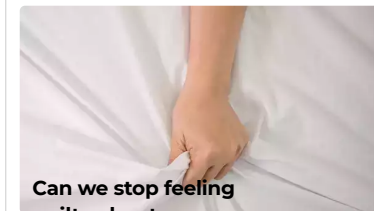
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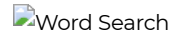
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TNN / Jan 26, 2022, 01:20 IST



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Former Union minister and a known face of Congress Kunwar Ratanjit Pratap Narain Singh, popularly known as RPN, quit the party on Tuesday and joined BJP, a development seen as a personal jolt to Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

Accompanied by Union minister and long-time political associate Jyotiraditya Scindia, Singh joined the party in the presence of Dharmendra Pradhan, who is poll in-charge for BJP in Uttar Pradesh and has been working towards consolidating the party's dominance over the OBC vote-bank, a factor seen as crucial in its performance in 2014, 2019 Lok Sabha polls and 2017 assembly polls in the state.

BJP sources said new entrant Singh would be utilised as a rigorous campaigner in OBC-dominated eastern region adjoining his native place in Kushinagar-Padrauna in eastern

UP. He had earlier represented the Padrauna assembly constituency and defeated Swami Prasad Maurya from Kushinagar in the 2009 Lok Sabha polls.

Chosen to be one of the 30 "star campaigners" for Congress in UP only on Monday, Singh is the third former Union minister after Scindia and Jitin Prasada to quit Congress and join BJP.

Soon after sending his resignation letter to Congress president Sonia Gandhi and shortly before joining BJP, RPN Singh in a tweet said: "This is a new beginning for me and I look forward to my contribution to nation-building under the visionary leadership and guidance of the honourable Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi, BJP president Shri @JPNadda ji & honourable Home Minister @AmitShah ji."



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building under the visionary leadership & guidance of the Honourable Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi, BJP President Shri @JPNadda ji & Honourable Home Minister @AmitShah ji.

2:17 PM · Jan 25, 2022

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While joining the party, Singh said he had worked for Congress for 32 years with honesty, dedication and full commitment but neither the party nor its ideology is the same, which it used to be when he had joined it.

“For several years, my supporters were suggesting to join BJP... but better late than never, and I have joined the party and will contribute in nation-building which is possible only under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi,” Singh said.

He said assembly polls are happening in five states but his native state Uttar Pradesh is the heart of the country, where the double-engine government of Yogi Adityanath and PM Modi at the Centre have introduced several schemes, which was never done earlier.

“I have been politically active in UP and I can say that the law and order situation has immensely improved under Yogi Adityanath,” Singh said and added that he would accept whatever responsibility is given to him in his new party.

Singh was also the in-charge of Congress affairs in Jharkhand where the party is in power along with JMM.

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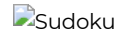
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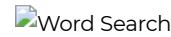
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