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Government Deploys 800 IAS Officers for Village Outreach

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At least 800 Deputy Secretaries, Under-Secretaries and Director-level officers, drawn from various Ministries have been assigned about 75 villages to visit, as part of the **Extended Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (EGSA)** from June 1 to August 15.

Key Points

- Ministries of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj and the Department of Personnel and Training are jointly coordinating the drive.
- In total, 49,178 villages — most with a majority SC/ST population — are being targeted.
- The government has deployed these officers to ensure the ground implementation of 7 flagship social welfare schemes in 117 aspirational districts by Independence Day.
- The campaign is being observed as a model for future implementation of welfare delivery.
- In each village, the Central team convenes a meeting of villagers and beneficiaries along with a State government or district official, a lead bank representative and local officials from the agencies responsible for enrolling people into the schemes.
- Central officers could direct the local representatives to give immediate sanction for gas cylinders, bank accounts or electricity connections.
- The teams can also directly input the day's progress into a data system which can be tracked live on the EGSA dashboard.

Senior Ministry officials can also make direct daily calls to a section of District Collectors to monitor progress, while third-party observers for each district, mostly from NGOs or academia, have been drafted in to do random checks of villages and report back to the Ministry.

Concerns

- Questions are being raised about Centre-State relations under this model, in an election year. Constitutionally, while the Centre has higher powers of taxation, the bulk of the expenditure on welfare is to be borne by the States.

- The large-scale involvement of Central officers raises questions about the viability of such drives, and about roles of centre and states in a federal democracy.
- The centralising trend in flagship welfare scheme allows the ruling party at the Centre to draw political mileage and build vote banks.

Direct connections to the district administration tend to bypass State administrations. Also, sending out large Central teams to do the work of local officials fails to empower local human resources.

Gram Swaraj Abhiyan

- Gram Swaraj Abhiyan was launched under the Ministry of Rural Development in April 2018.
- It aims to promote social harmony, spread awareness about pro-poor initiatives of government and also to obtain their feedback on various welfare programmes.
- During this campaign, saturation of eligible households/persons in identified villages would be made under seven flagship pro-poor programmes.
- The seven programmes are Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Saubhagya, Ujala scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Mission Indradhanush.

Aspirational Districts Programme

- It was launched in January 2018, with an objective to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
- 117 districts have been identified until now, at least one from each state.
- The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a mass movement or a Jan Andolan.
- Each district is assigned a Prabhari (in-charge) officer from the Centre (of the additional secretary or joint secretary rank) and a Prabhari officer from the State (of the rank of Secretary to State government) who will work in cooperation with the district administration.