



News Analysis (20 May, 2021)

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Social Security Code 2020

Why in News

The effectiveness of the **Social Security Code (SS Code) 2020** in helping the informal workforce is questioned by many.

- With SS Code 2020, two other codes were passed which are **Code on Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code, 2020** and **Industrial Relations Code, 2020**.
- The **SS Code 2020 subsumes nine regulations** relating to social security, retirement and employee benefits.

Key Points

- **Major Provisions of SS Code 2020:**

- **Enhanced Coverage:**

The Code has **widened coverage by including the unorganised sector**, fixed term employees and gig workers, platform workers, inter-state migrant workers etc.

- **National Database and Registration:**

With the aim of making a national database for unorganised sector workers, **registration of all these workers would be done on an online portal** and this registration would be done **on the basis of Self certification** through a simple procedure.

All **records and returns** have to be **maintained electronically**.

- **Social Security Fund:**

It will be created on the financial side in order to implement social security schemes.

- **Uniform Definitions:**

- There is **uniformity in determining wages** for the purpose of social security benefits.

It has provided a **wide definition for wage**.

- Specific exclusions with ceilings have been provided for **discouraging inappropriate structuring of salaries** to minimise social security benefits.

- **Consultative Approach:**

It has brought in a facilitating approach by the authorities. Unlike the existing role of inspectors, the **Code provides for an enhanced role of inspector-cum-facilitator** whereby **employers can look for support and advice to enhance compliances**.

- **Career Centre:**

To enable that demand for human resources is met and to monitor employment information, **career centres will be established**.

- **Stringent Penalties:**

Any failure to deposit employees' contributions not only attracts a **penalty of Rs. 1,00,000, but also imprisonment of one to three years**. In case of **repeat offence, the penalties and prosecution is severe**, and no compounding is permitted for repeated offences.

- **Concerns:**
 - **Online Registration Process:**
 - The **onus lies on informal workers registering as beneficiaries**, further they **do not have digital literacy and connectivity**.
 - Also, there is a **lack of awareness** among informal workers **regarding social security schemes**.
 - **Lack of Inter-State Arrangement and Cooperation:**
Unorganised workers are spread across the length and breadth of India. **Implications** of this code **would be too varied across States** to be administered.
 - **Complicated Processes & Overlapping Jurisdiction:**
Providing holistic social security cover for the unorganised workforce in a simple and effective manner is lost in the **Centre-State procedural complications and jurisdictional or institutional overlap**.
 - **Maternity Benefit:**
Women engaged in the **unorganised sector remain outside the purview of maternity benefit**.
 - **Employees Provident Fund:**
For informal sector workers, **access to employees' provident fund remains unfulfilled too in the new code**.
 - **Payment of Gratuity:**
Although payment of gratuity was expanded in the new Code, it **still remains inaccessible for a vast majority of informal workers**.

Way Forward

- The SS Code 2020 **merges existing social security laws** and attempts to include informal workers within the ambit of social security administration. However, an examination of the code reveals that **universalisation of social security remains an unfulfilled aspiration**.
- At a time when India chairs a **BRICS** meeting that is **focused on issues of labour, especially informality, it fails to even recognise that India is ageing without social security**, and the demographic dividend of the young workforce that could support the ageing ends in 15 years.
- The **provision of social security could be used to formalise the workforce** to a certain extent.
- **Employers should be made to own up to the responsibility of providing social security** to their workers.
As the state has a responsibility but the **primary responsibility still lies with employers** since they are taking advantage of workers' productivity.

Source:TH

Single-Use Plastic

Why in News

Recently, a report was published which gave details of who makes **single-use plastic**, **130 million tons a year** at last count, and **who makes money from it**.

The report was published by **Minderoo, a nonprofit organization** based in Australia along with **academics at the University of Oxford and the Stockholm Environment Institute**.

Key Points

- **Major Producers:**

Half of the world's single-use plastic is made by **20 big companies**.

Two US companies followed by a **Chinese-owned petrochemicals giant**, and another one based in Bangkok.

- **Major Investors:**

- Production is financed by **financial services companies including banks**.

- Governments are also big stakeholders in this industry. About **40% of the largest single-use plastic makers are partly owned by governments**, including **China and Saudi Arabia**.

- **Growth:**

Single-use plastic has been a very good business, and that's projected to continue. In the **next five years alone, production capacity is forecast to grow by 30%**.

- **Usage:**

There's a huge disparity between richer and poorer nations:

An average **American uses and throws away 50 kilograms** of single-use plastic every year whereas an average **Indian uses less than one-twelfth of an American**.

- **Concerns:**

- **Less Recycling:**

Only about **8% of plastic gets recycled in the US**. It is far cheaper to **make things out of newly produced plastic than from recycled plastic**.

- **Limited Efforts:**

- State and municipal governments have had success in banning certain items like plastic grocery bags, foam cups and drinking straws. But the **efforts focused on curtailing the production of single-use plastic have been limited so far**.

- Advocacy efforts to persuade consumers to use less plastic **have failed to gain traction**.

- **Global Initiatives:**
 - **European Union** issued a directive calling for consumer brands to use at least 30% recycled content in plastic bottles by 2025.
- **Indian Initiatives:**
 - In 2019, the Union government in a bid to **free India of single-use plastics by 2022**, had **laid out a multi-ministerial plan** to discourage the use of single-use plastics across the country.
 - **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016** which **extended the responsibility to collect waste generated from the products** to their producers and brand owners.

Single-Use Plastics

- **About:**
 - Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are **used only once before they are thrown away or recycled.**
 - These items are things like **plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.**
 - Plastic is so **cheap and convenient** that it has replaced all other materials from the packaging industry but it **takes hundreds of years to disintegrate.**
 - It is a huge problem. If we look at the data, out of **9.46 million tonnes of plastic waste generated every year** in our country, **43% is single use plastic.**
- **Uses:**
 - The single-use plastic products also **prevent the spread of infection.**
 - Instruments such as **syringes, applicators, drug tests, bandages and wraps are often made to be disposable.**
 - Also, single-use plastic products have been **enlisted in the fight against food waste**, keeping food and water fresher for longer and **reducing the potential for contamination.**
- **Problems:**
 - **Petroleum-based plastic is not biodegradable** and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
 - In the process of breaking down, **it releases toxic chemicals** (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic) which **make their way into our food and water supply.**



Way Forward

- Economically **affordable and ecologically viable alternatives** which will not burden the resources are needed and their prices will also come down with time and increase in demand.
 - Need to **promote alternatives** like cotton, khadi bags and biodegradable plastics.
 - More R&D (Research & Development) and finances for it, are needed to **look for sustainably viable options**.
- Citizens have to bring **behavioural change** and contribute by not littering and helping in waste segregation and waste management.

Source:IE

Malerkotla: The 23rd District of Punjab

Why in News

Recently, the Punjab government has announced the formation of **Malerkotla** as the **23rd district of the state**.

Section 5 of the **Punjab Land Revenue Act, 1887** says the “State government may, by notification, vary the limits and alter the numbers of tehsils, districts and divisions into which the State is divided.”

Key Points

History of Malerkotla:

- The Malerkotla is former princely state and only **Muslim-dominated town of Punjab.**
- Historically, Malerkotla **owes its foundations in the 15th century to Sufi saint Sheikh Sadrauddin Sadar-i-Jahan**, also known as Haider Sheikh.
- **After the decline of the Mughal empire**, Malerkotla's rulers exercised greater independence and at the time of the invasion of India by **Ahmad Shah Abdali** from Afghanistan, they **aligned with him.**
Ahmed Shah Abdali **invaded India eight times from 1748 to 1767.**
- In 19th century, Malerkotla became one among the **cis-Sutlej states.**
- Malerkotla **continued under the British protection** and the alliance with the neighbouring Sikh states **till 1947** when it **became the only Muslim majority Sikh state** in East Punjab.
- After the dissolution of the princely states in 1948, **Malerkotla joined the new state of PEPSU** or Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). **PEPSU itself was dissolved in 1954** and Malerkotla became a part of Punjab.

Cis- Sutlej Sates

- The Cis-Sutlej states **were a group of small states in Punjab region in the 19th century**, lying between the Sutlej River on the north, the Himalayas on the east, the Yamuna River and Delhi District on the south, and Sirsa District on the west.
- The states were **called Cis- Sutlej by the British** because they were on the British, or southern, side of the Sutlej River.
- The Cis-Sutlej states **included Kaithal, Patiala, Jind, Thanesar, Malerkotla and Faridkot.**
- Under the threat of absorption into Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom, they appealed to the British, who established dominance over them by the **Treaty of Amritsar with Ranjit Singh (1809).**
- The **states survived until the independence of India (1947)**, at which time they were organized into the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU).
- They subsequently were **absorbed into the Indian states of Punjab and Haryana.**

Malerkotla and the Sikh Community:

- **'Haa Da Naara' Episode (1705):**

Malerkotla Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan had raised his voice ('Haa Da Naara') against brutal execution of Chote Sahibzade (youngest sons of **Guru Gobind Singh** — Zorawar Singh (9) and Fateh Singh (6) – by Nawab of Sirhind, Wazir Khan in 1705.

Gurdwara Haa da Naara Sahib was built in Malerkotla to commemorate the voice raised by Sher Mohammad Khan.

- **Wadda Ghallugara (1762):** The Nawab Bhikam Shah **fought on the side of Abdali's forces in a battle against the Sikhs** in 1762.

The battle is known as 'Wadda Ghallugara' or the Great Holocaust where tens and thousands of Sikhs were killed.

- **Treaty of Friendship (1769):** In 1769, a treaty of friendship was signed with Raja Amar Singh of Patiala by the then Nawab of Malerkotla.

- **Namdhari Massacre (1872):** The **British administration of Malerkotla (Punjab) was attacked by the contingents of Namdharis** (a sect of Sikhs) under the leadership of **Hira Singh** and **lehna Singh**, on 15th January, 1872.

The British Administration ordered that the Namdhari revolutionaries should be brought to the Parade Ground and blown up with cannons.

That ground as a symbol of martyrdom has been named now as **'Kukian Da Shaheedi Park'**.

Creation of New District

- **Role of State:** The **power to create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts** rests with the **State governments**.

- This can **either be done through an executive order or by passing a law** in the State Assembly.
- Many States prefer the executive route by simply issuing a notification in the official gazette.

- **Purpose of Creation:** States argue that smaller districts **lead to better administration and governance**.

For example, in 2016, the **Assam government** issued a notification to upgrade the Majuli sub-division to **Majuli district** for "administrative expediency".

- **Role of Centre:** The Centre has **no role to play in the alteration of districts or creation of new ones**. States are free to decide.

Role of Home Ministry: The Home Ministry comes into the picture **when a State wants to change the name of a district or a railway station**.

- The State government's request is sent to other departments and agencies such as the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Geographical Survey of India Sciences and the Railway Ministry seeking clearance.
- A **no-objection certificate** may be issued after examining their replies.

- **Number of Districts in India:**

- According to the **2011 Census**, there were **593 districts** in the country.
 - Between 2001-2011, as many as 46 districts were created by States.
 - Though the **2021 Census** is yet to happen, **currently there are 718 districts in the country.**
- The surge in number is also due to **bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh** into A.P and Telangana in 2014.

Source: IE

Infrastructure Status for Convention Centres

Why in News

The Finance Ministry has granted '**Infrastructure**' status for **exhibition and convention centres.**

In 2020, the government had added **affordable rental housing projects** to the list of sectors recognised as infrastructure.

Key Points

- **Infrastructure Status to Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre:**

- Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre has been **included in the Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors** by insertion of a new item **in the category of Social and Commercial Infrastructure.**
- However, the benefits available as 'infrastructure' projects **would only be available** for projects with a minimum built-up floor area of 1,00,000 square metres of exclusive exhibition space or convention space or both combined.
 - This **includes primary facilities** such as exhibition centres, convention halls, auditoriums, plenary halls, business centres, meeting halls etc.
- This move will **enable more such projects to come up across India's tourist destinations.**

- **Need for the Infrastructure Status:**

- **India doesn't have large convention centres** or single halls with capacities to hold 7,000 to 10,000 people, **unlike countries like Thailand** that is a **major global MICE destination.**
- Becoming a **MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) destination** can **generate significant revenue with several global companies active in India.**

- **Harmonised Master List of Infrastructure sub-sectors:**
 - The list is **notified by the Ministry of Finance** and included following **categories:**
 - **Transport and Logistics:** Roads and bridges, Inland waterways, Airport, etc.
 - **Energy:** Electricity Generation, Electricity Transmission, etc.
 - **Water and Sanitation:** Solid Waste Management, Water treatment plants, etc.
 - **Communication:** Telecommunication, etc.
 - **Social and Commercial Infrastructure:** Education Institutions (capital stock), Sports Infrastructure, Hospitals (capital stock), Tourism infrastructure, etc.
 - **Inclusion in the list** implies access to **concessional funds, promotion of projects and continuity of construction for the specified sub-sectors.**
 - However, the infrastructure tag **now does not include vital tax breaks.**

Source: TH

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana

Why in News

Setting up of **22 new regional AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences)** has been approved under the **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)** so far.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - **Launch:**

PMSSY was announced **in 2003** with objectives of correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/reliable tertiary healthcare services and also to augment facilities for quality medical education in the country.
 - **Nodal Ministry:**

Ministry of **Health and Family Welfare.**
 - **Two Components:**
 - Setting up of **AIIMS like institutions.**
 - **Upgradation of government medical colleges** in various states.

The **project cost** for upgradation of each medical college institution is **shared by the Centre and the state.**

- **Other Initiatives Related to Healthcare Sector:**
 - **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Nidhi (PMSSN)**
A **single non-lapsable reserve fund for Health** from the proceeds of Health and Education Cess.
 - **PM Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Scheme:**
 - Announced in the **Union Budget 2021-22**.
 - **Aims** to develop capacities of primary, secondary, and tertiary care health systems even in the last miles of the nation, and developing a modern ecosystem for research, testing and treatment in the country itself.
 - **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM):**
The NDHM is a complete digital health ecosystem with four key features — **health ID, personal health records, Digi Doctor and health facility registry.**
 - **Ayushman Bharat** (a two-pronged approach):
 - Creation of **health and wellness centres** to bring health care closer to homes.
 - The formulation of a **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)** to protect poor and vulnerable families against financial risk arising out of catastrophic health episodes.
 - **National Health Policy (NHP) 2017:**
Aims to provide healthcare in an “assured manner” to all, the NHP 2017 strives to address current and emerging challenges arising from the ever-changing socio-economic, technological and epidemiological scenarios.
 - **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP)**
PMBJP stores have been set up to provide **generic drugs**, which are available at lesser prices but are equivalent in quality and efficacy as expensive branded drugs.
 - **National Health Mission:**
 - NHM was launched by the government of India **in 2013** subsuming the National Rural Health Mission and the National Urban Health Mission.
 - The main programmatic components include Health System Strengthening in rural and urban areas for - **Reproductive-Maternal- Neonatal-Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A)**, and **Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases.**

Source: PIB

Tianwen-1: China's Mars Mission

Why in News

Recently, China's spacecraft **Tianwen-1** landed on Mars carrying its **first Mars rover** named **Zhurong**.

- It became the **third country** to land on Mars **after the US and Soviet Union**.
- **China's previous 'Yinghuo-1' Mars mission**, which was supported by a Russian spacecraft, **had failed** after it did not leave the earth's orbit and disintegrated over the Pacific Ocean in **2012**.

Key Points

- **About the Tianwen-1 Mission:**

- **Launch:**

- The **Tianwen-1 Spacecraft** was **lifted off on a Long March 5 rocket**, from the Wenchang launch center in **July 2020**.

- **Three Parts:**

- The Spacecraft consists of three parts - the **orbiter, the lander and the rover** - which separated in Mars orbit.
 - The **orbiter will remain in the orbit for scientific operations** and to relay signals while the **lander-rover combination has made an autonomous descent and landing**.

- The **lander from Tianwen-1 has touched down on Utopia Planitia**, a large plain in the northern hemisphere of Mars.

- **Objectives:**

- To conduct scientific investigations into the planet's soil, geological structure, environment, atmosphere and water.

- The mission **will be the first to place a ground-penetrating radar** on the Martian surface, which will be able to study local geology, as well as rock, ice, and dirt distribution.

- **China's Other Space Programmes:**

- **Chang'e-5** (Moon)
 - **Tianhe** (Permanent Space Station)

- **Other Mars Missions:**

- **NASA's Perseverance Rover**

- **UAE's Hope Mars Mission** (UAE's first-ever interplanetary mission)

- **India's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) or Mangalyaan:**

- It was launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh by **Indian Space Research Organisation** in November 2013.
 - It was launched on board a PSLV C25 rocket with the aim of studying Martian surface and mineral composition as well as scan its atmosphere for methane (an indicator of life on Mars).

Mars

- **Size and Distance:**
 - It is the **fourth planet from the Sun** and the **second-smallest** planet in the Solar System.
 - Mars is about **half the size of Earth**.
- **Similarity to the Earth (Orbit and Rotation):**
 - As Mars orbits the Sun, it completes **one rotation every 24.6 hours**, which is very similar to one day on **Earth (23.9 hours)**.
 - Mars' axis of rotation is **tilted 25 degrees** with respect to the plane of its orbit around the Sun. This is similar to **Earth**, which has **an axial tilt of 23.4 degrees**.
 - Mars has distinct seasons like Earth, but **they last longer than seasons on Earth**.

Martian days are called sols—short for 'solar day'.
- **Other Features:**
 - The **reason Mars looks reddish** is due to oxidation or rusting of iron in the rocks, and dust of Mars. Hence it is also called the **Red Planet**.
 - It has the **largest volcano** in the solar system i.e. **Olympus Mons**.
 - It has **two small moons, Phobos and Deimos**.

Source: TH

E-Way Bill Integration with FASTag, RFID

Why in News

The Union Government has integrated the E-Way Bill (EWB) system with FasTag and RFID.

Key Points

- **Electronic Way (E-Way) Bill:**
 - **E-Way Bill** is usually a unique bill number generated for the specific consignment involving the movement of goods.
 - Under the **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** regime, **EWBs are mandatory** for inter-state transportation of goods valued over Rs. 50,000 from April 2018, with the exemption to precious items such as gold.
 - It is a mechanism **to ensure that goods being transported comply with the GST Law** and is **a tool to track movement of goods and check tax evasion**.

- **FASTag:**
 - The **FASTag** is a reloadable tag that **allows automatic deduction of toll** without having to stop for carrying out the cash transaction.
 - The tag uses **Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology** and is fixed on the windscreen of the vehicle once active.
 - RFID is the **use of radio waves to read and capture information** stored on a tag attached to an object.
 - A tag can be read from up to several feet away and does not need to be within the direct line-of-sight of the reader to be tracked.
 - From 15th February, 2021, **FASTag has become compulsory for all vehicles** across the country.
 - It is **operated by National Highway Authority of India (NHAI)**.
- **Significance of Integration:**
 - **Large Movement of Goods Vehicles:** On an average, 25 lakh goods vehicle movements from more than 800 tolls are reported on a daily basis to the E-Way Bill system.
 - **Live Vigilance:** The integration of EWB, RFID and FASTag will **enable tax officers to undertake live vigilance in respect of EWB compliances** by businesses.
 - Taxmen can now access reports on vehicles that have passed the selected tolls without e-way bills in the past few minutes.
 - **Stop Revenue Leakage :** It will aid in preventing revenue leakage by **real-time identification of cases of recycling and/or non-generation of EWBs**.

Source:IE
