



Manual Scavengers Enumeration Exercise

For Prelims: Initiatives to tackle Menace of Manual Scavenging, Swachh Bharat Mission

For Mains: Menace of Manual Scavenging, Issues related to SC, STs

Why in News?

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJ&E) is preparing to undertake a nationwide survey to **enumerate all Sanitation workers engaged in cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.**

What are the Key Points?

- The enumeration exercise is part of **the National Action Plan for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) Scheme** and will be conducted across **500 [AMRUT \(Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation\)](#) cities.**
- It will merge with and replace the **Self-Employment Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS)**, which was started in 2007.
- Programme Monitoring Units (PMUs) for the 500 AMRUT cities will be set up to carry out the exercise.
- Once this exercise is completed across the 500 cities, it will be **expanded nationwide, making it easier to bring government benefits** like upskilling and loan and capital subsidies to them.

What is the NAMASTE Scheme?

- **About:**
 - It was launched in July 2022.
 - The NAMASTE scheme is being undertaken jointly by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the MoSJ&E and **aims to eradicate unsafe sewer and septic tank cleaning practices.**
- **Objectives:**
 - Zero fatalities in sanitation work in India.
 - All sanitation work **is performed by skilled workers.**
 - No sanitation workers come in direct contact with human faecal matter.
 - Sanitation workers are collectivised into **[Self Help Groups \(SHGs\)](#)** and are empowered to run sanitation enterprises.
 - Strengthened supervisory and monitoring systems at National, State and Urban Local Body (ULB) levels to ensure enforcement and monitoring of safe sanitation work.
 - Increased awareness among sanitation services seekers (individuals and institutions) to seek services from registered and skilled sanitation workers.

What is the Need for Enumeration Exercise?

- **Manual Scavenging** has led to at least **351 deaths since 2017**.
- It is aimed at streamlining the process of rehabilitating sanitation workers.
- It will make it easier to bring government benefits like upskilling and loan and capital subsidies to them.
- To link listed sanitation workers to the **Swaachha Udyami Yojana**, through which the workers will be able to own sanitation machines themselves and the government will ensure that at the municipality level, the work keeps coming in.
 - Swaachha Udyami Yojana has twin objectives of **cleanliness and providing livelihood to [Safai Karamcharis](#)** and liberated Manual Scavengers to achieve the overall goal of **[“Swachh Bharat Abhiyan”](#)**.

What is Manual Scavenging?

- Manual scavenging is defined as **“the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning septic tanks, gutters and sewers”**.
- India banned the practice under the **[Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 \(PEMSR\)](#)**.
 - The Act bans the use of any individual manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of or otherwise handling in any manner human excreta till its disposal.
 - The Act recognizes **manual scavenging as a “dehumanizing practice**.

Why is Manual Scavenging Still Prevalent?

- **Indifferent Attitude:**
 - A number of independent surveys have talked about **the continued reluctance on the part of state governments** to admit that the practice prevails under their watch.
- **Issues due to Outsourcing:**
 - Many times, local **bodies outsource sewer cleaning tasks to private contractors**. **However**, many of them fly-by-night operators, do not maintain proper roles of sanitation workers.
 - In case after case of workers being asphyxiated to death, **these contractors have denied any association with the deceased**.
- **Social Issue:**
 - The practice is driven by **caste, class and income divides**.
 - It is linked to India’s caste system where so-called lower castes are expected to perform this job.
 - In 1993, **India banned the employment of people as manual scavengers** (The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993), however, the stigma and discrimination associated with it still linger on.
 - This makes **it difficult for liberated manual scavengers** to secure alternative livelihoods.
- **Lack of Enforcement and Unskilled Labourers:**
 - The lack of enforcement of the Act and exploitation of unskilled labourers are the reasons why the practice is still prevalent in India.

What are the Steps taken to tackle the Menace of Manual Scavenging?

- **[The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation \(Amendment\) Bill, 2020:](#)**
 - It proposes to completely mechanise sewer cleaning, introduce ways for ‘on-site’ protection and provide compensation to manual scavengers in case of sewer deaths.
 - It will be an amendment to The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.
 - It is still awaiting cabinet approval.
- **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013:**
 - Superseding the 1993 Act, the 2013 Act goes beyond prohibitions on dry latrines, and outlaws all manual excrement cleaning of insanitary latrines, open drains, or pits.

- **The Building and Maintenance of Insanitary Latrines Act of 2013:**
 - It outlaws construction or maintenance of unsanitary toilets, and the hiring of anybody for their manual scavenging, as well as of hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.
 - It also provides a constitutional responsibility to provide alternative jobs and other assistance to manual scavenging communities, as reparation for historical injustice and indignity.
- **Prevention of Atrocities Act:**
 - In 1989, the Prevention of [Atrocities Act](#) became an integrated guard for sanitation workers, more than 90% people employed as manual scavengers belonged to the Scheduled Caste. This became an important landmark to free manual scavengers from designated traditional occupations.
- **Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge:**
 - It was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on [World Toilet Day](#) (19th November) in 2020.
 - The Government launched this “challenge” for all states to make sewer-cleaning mechanised by April 2021 — if any human needs to enter a sewer line in case of unavoidable emergency, proper gear and oxygen tanks, etc., are to be provided.
- **‘Swachhta Abhiyan App’:**
 - It has been developed to identify and geotag the data of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers so that the insanitary latrines can be replaced with sanitary latrines and rehabilitate all the manual scavengers to provide dignity of life to them.
- **SC Judgment:** In 2014, a [Supreme Court](#) order made it mandatory for the government to identify all those who died in sewage work since 1993 and provide Rs. 10 lakh each as compensation to their families.

Way Forward

- With [Swachh Bharat Mission](#) identified as a top priority area by the [15th Finance Commission](#) and funds available for smart cities and urban development providing for a strong case to address the problem of manual scavenging.
- To address the social sanction behind manual scavenging, **it is required first to acknowledge and then understand how and why manual scavenging continues** to be embedded in the caste system.
- The state and society **need to take active interest in the issue and look into all possible options** to accurately assess and subsequently eradicate this practice.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. ‘Rashtriya Garima Abhiyaan’ is a national campaign to (2016)

- (a) rehabilitate the homeless and destitute persons and provide them with suitable sources of livelihood
 (b) release the sex workers from their practice and provide them with alternative sources of livelihood
 (c) eradicate the practice of manual scavenging and rehabilitate the manual scavengers
 (d) release the bonded labourers from their bondage and rehabilitate them

Ans: (c)

Exp:

- Rashtriya Garima Abhiyaan **is a national campaign for dignity and eradication of manual scavenging** launched by Jan Sahas in 2001.
- **Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.**

Mains

Q. What are the areas of prohibitive labour that can be sustainably managed by robots? Discuss the

initiatives that can propel the research in premier research institutes for substantive and gainful innovation. **(2015)**

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