

**JAN SAROKAR**

**People's Policy for Post COVID-19 Times**

August 2020



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In a “Parliamentary Democracy” a functional and healthy Parliament, is the fulcrum of its institutional structure. It is the central pillar of a ‘democratic’ policy making framework, and along with public monitoring, it is the platform through which the countervailing balance of power between the different wings of government can be maintained. This is particularly important for ensuring the accountability of the executive to the people. To not have a functional Parliament at this time, is to lose the contribution of one of the most important institutions of democracy, in ensuring the better involvement of citizens, and different institutions of the state, in facing a crisis like the current pandemic.

The non-convening of the monsoon session of the Indian Parliament in 2020 in critical times of a national pandemic, assumed gigantic proportions of lack of transparency, accountability, and public monitoring. The entire process of decision making in Covid times has been cloaked in secrecy and where decisions have been taken top down in a centralized manner. The public health and lockdown policies have barely been subject to scrutiny even by the highest courts.

Under such circumstances, people and their organizations have no choice but to attempt to convene an alternative platform that involves citizens, civil society organizations, independent experts and political parties in a deliberative framework to discuss the status of each area of importance in COVID times, the challenges being faced and the range of potential policy alternatives to overcome these challenges. Given the lack of parliamentary oversight, such a platform would atleast allow in their groups to place on record what they have been through over the last 5 months, how much Government policies benefitted them, what they have suffered and what their thoughts are about the future. It is clear that in such a period face to face interactions are very limited. While online communication is an incomplete form of deliberation and it is by its nature exclusive. Many civil society organizations have attempted at hybrid means of communication and deliberation so that the views of people without access to digital mediums can have their views reflected on online platforms as well.

Many civil society organizations and social movements have come together in the past, under the banner of Jan Sarokar to hold Jan Sansads where political party leaders have been invited to listen to peoples’ concerns and carry those views to Parliament. The Jan Sarokar platform brought together social movements across a range of issues to critique Government Policy as well as present practical alternatives, and communicate them to elected representatives to build and promote participatory democratic dialogue in the sphere of social justice and rights.

Today more than 50 civil society organizations, peoples’ campaigns, social movements and issue based networks, including Jan Sarokar have come together to present to the Parliament, the Executive, the Judiciary and most importantly to the people of the country the true status of governance in India over the past 5 months. This report which has been collectively drawn up by civil society, lays down the manner in which key rights have been undermined in the midst of a pandemic over a range of sectors such as health and nutrition, education, employment, discrimination, civil liberties, agriculture, banking, disability rights, women’s rights, judicial accountability, environment, social security amongst others. While clearly laying out the failures of the Government in meeting its constitutional duty to protect and promote the rights of its citizens during the pandemic, the report also lays out specific demands for reform in each sector that will enable the building of our lives and livelihoods in a holistic, sustainable and dignified manner.

The proposal is presented in three parts - positive demands of increased entitlements, allocation and new laws. The second is improving and strengthening existing laws and systems and the third are policies that need to be stopped without delay.

### **Part I: Positive Demands**

COVID crisis presents a crucial opportunity to redesign our economy towards generating tens of millions of ecologically sustainable and dignified livelihoods. The following are our positive

demands, of enhanced entitlements, allocations, resources, rethinking and passing of new laws and policies.

### **1. COVID related policies**

- i. Increase the number of testing centres and its capacity to ensure that samples are taken from all such settlements which typically accommodate marginalized communities.
- ii. Take particular care of the elderly at risk by making geriatric OPDs follow a COVID Standard Operating Procedure and make tests and treatment for senior citizens free.
- iii. Make awareness on Covid-19 more accessible for linguistic diversities (including sign language users) and people with visual impairments.
- iv. Make a law as per the right to privacy judgement to regulate Aarogya Setu which should be completely voluntary.
- v. Direct private companies to provide Covid-19 specific insurance covers to all their employees.
- vi. Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health should meet immediately and assess the situation, both in terms of ground situation and the policy pronouncements, and advise the government
- vii. Reserve Bank of India should form a dedicated committee to ensure that all the COVID relief measures are implemented by banks completely.

### **2. Healthcare**

- i. Increase public spending on health to 5% of GDP in the long run and to at least 3% of GDP by 2024. Transfer to state governments on the basis of the Finance Commission formula. Increase public investment on health research. Channelize allocation towards strengthening the public system in a sustainable manner rather than directing funds to purchase care from the ill-equipped private sector.
- ii. Expanding the Clinical Establishment Act of 2010 along with ensuring its effective, generalised implementation immediately. Establishing regulation of rates as a central feature of this Act.
- iii. Universal implementation of Patient Rights Charter, making it legally mandatory, and establishing an empowered Patient Grievance Redressal mechanism.
- iv. Public harnessing of the private healthcare sector, bringing under public direction at least 80% of beds in all private hospitals above minimum size. Formation of multi-stakeholder health councils at district, city and state level. Develop community-based health and social development plan through collective and participatory approach.
- v. Accessible and targeted health services for people with disabilities, co-morbidities and senior citizens. All healthcare facilities must follow provisions of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and ensure persons with disabilities can access these facilities without any barrier.
- vi. Provided counselling support to minorities and scheduled caste and tribes during admission and their stay in the hospital. Take proactive steps to dispel myths in the community through messaging by frontline workers and partnering with NGOs.
- vii. Increase the Geriatric Facilities for elderly in every district hospital across the country as per Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Seniors Act. Provide a universal insurance of at least Rs. 5 lacs for all elderly.
- viii. Ensure sexual reproductive health services without disruption including access to contraception, safe abortion, counselling and maternal health services at all levels from the village to the district hospital.
- ix. Guarantee access to free essential and lifesaving medicines and diagnostics for all through public health facilities. Investment in pharma and medical equipment manufacturing industries led by PSUs. Establish centralised and transparent procurement, and decentralised distribution to ensure regular availability of good quality generic medicines in public facilities.

### **3. Food Security and Nutrition**

- i. Immediately release more food grain stocks to state governments for free distribution for 3 months, to those in need (80% of population to be defined by the states, irrespective of ration card status).
- ii. In order to avoid exclusion errors, PDS benefits must be made universal for all residents without making Aadhaar/UID mandatory.
- iii. The coverage of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana must be doubled to cover all vulnerable groups such as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), old people and single women.
- iv. Grains, Pulses and Edible Oils: 10kg of grains, 1.5 kg pulses/dal and 800gms of cooking oil must be provided per person per month, through the PDS, at subsidised prices.
- v. Provide financial resources to ensure hot, cooked, nutritious meals with eggs and fruit or take home rations for all pregnant and lactating mothers at Anganwadi Centres.
- vi. Provide compensatory food security allowance for at least 100 million families who have been excluded from the NFSA since 2013, despite population growth.
- vii. Provide compensation for all families with starvation deaths.
- viii. Extend the distribution of free grains and dal under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana beyond November 2020, and include the elderly.
- ix. Canteens serving subsidised and nutritious meals must be set up in all cities and towns, akin to the Amma canteens in Tamil Nadu. In rural areas, open up school mid day meals or anganwadi centres for provision of food to destitute, aged, single women and disabled. Give seed/financial grants to women's groups and ensure income for women collective to cook food at anganwadis for community feeding.
- x. Provide home delivery or spot feeding of a comprehensive nutrition package with cereals, pulses, oil and eggs for children under fourteen years, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls till schools and anganwadis re-open.
- xi. Eggs, milk and fruits must be provided in all schools and anganwadis. For children who do not eat eggs additional provision of fruits or milk can be made.
- xii. Expand the National Creche Scheme. Twenty-five percent of anganwadi centres must be converted to anganwadi-cum-crèches. The mid-day meal scheme should be extended to all children up to class XII.
- xiii. Expand Ujjwala cooking gas fuel benefit to all priority and antyodaya households.

#### **4. Education**

- i. Table National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) in Parliament for discussion.
- ii. Extension of Right to Education Act 2009 from 3-18 years to universalise of school education.
- iii. Declare timeline for allocation of 6% GDP to education.
- iv. Parliament should review implementation of RTE Act and set the new timeline for its complete implementation.
- v. Supreme Court to intervene for the non-implementation of RTE Act 2009 even after 10 years of its enactment.
- vi. Stop exclusion through online instruction and explore alternative means.
- vii. Take steps to stop commercialisation and regulate non state actors in education
- viii. Address specific barriers to education faced by Dalit, Adivasi, minority children, children with disabilities, girls and other vulnerable groups.
- ix. End rationalisation/merger of schools
- x. Ensure disinfection of schools and ensure availability of adequate WASH facilities before their re-opening.
- xi. Ensure all teachers' vacancies are filled with immediate effect and pending salaries and allowances should be paid with immediate effect.
- xii. Teachers operate out of varied local schools but also government offices including local panchayat offices, post offices and ration shops. That these centres must be provided with online devices and sanitizing materials so that can continue our education in a safe environment. That these new COVID centres of learning could also become our local mental health and safety centres.

- xiii. That our Parents and elder siblings could take worksheets home for the younger ones each week to study at home.
- xiv. That rations for mid-day meals be provided to our mothers for all days including Sundays and holidays.
- xv. The government sets up formal and regular empowered platforms to consult us and our parents on an ongoing basis. If we can hold our Children's parliaments and continue to consult with the last child.
- xvi. Ensure the right to education, health and nutrition of children from migrant families affected because of COVID-19 pandemic.

## **5. Agricultural Sector and Farmers, Environment**

- i. Public investment in small-farmer based organic agriculture (shifting current fertilizer subsidy completely into this over 5 years), assistance to pastoralists, fishers and forest-dwellers, decentralized renewable energy and water harvesting, dispersed production of goods and services with a strong biomass and handmade base, integrated health services maximising nature-based healing and preventive care, and a massive livelihood programme based on regenerating the country's badly degraded soils and water systems.
- ii. Remunerative Minimum Support Price for all crops at C2+50% with guaranteed procurement.
- iii. Employment at minimum wage of Rs 600/day to all agricultural workers.
- iv. Increase of PM-KISAN to Rs.18,000 per year and extending benefits to tenant farmers and complete loan waiver for landless, tenant, small and middle peasants.
- v. Provide organic seeds and fertilisers with immediate effect and free of cost on a priority basis to women farmers, especially those who are single.
- vi. Access to interest free credit. Crop credit coverage is very low and that can be improved this season with complete interest subvention.
- vii. Provide bridge funds for FPOs and women's collectives.
- viii. Women collective run Custom Hiring Centers (CHC) ensuring access of women friendly tools and equipment at Panchayat level to women farmers.
- ix. Expand Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) to include landless women who are leasing land. Joint liability groups (JLGs), a model successful in Kerala and few other states could be strengthened by bringing JLGs to be brought on par with kisan credit cards in terms of interest, insurance and other terms and conditions.
- x. Expand PM Kisaan Sanman Nidhi to include women farmers irrespective of land holding and increase the amount from 6000/year to 15000 which would support farming activities that cannot be covered under NREGA.
- xi. Ensure access to grazing lands to livestock workers, feed, infrastructure, health care for all livestock needs to be provided. Common lands, banjar and poramboke lands have to be surveyed and reclaimed from those who have encroached on those lands and have to be handed over to the gram panchayats for grazing animals and growing fodder for livestock and for common use.
- xii. Urgent steps should be taken to reduce, eliminate, and replace sources of pollution, such that over a 10 to 15 year period, the quality of air, water and soil is brought to levels safe for human and other animal use; this includes substantially replacing private with public transport and harmful chemicals with safe substances, eliminating sources of noise, and treating all wastewater before discharging into waterbodies.
- xiii. Urgently devise effective institutional mechanisms for the collection, storage, procurement and sale of non timber forest produce during the ongoing collection season, and provide necessary financial and logistical support to Gram Sabhas and forest management committees constituted under Forest Rights Act together with other PPAs for direct procurement, ensuring fair prices, from the gatherers;
- xiv. MoEF to release the huge compensatory afforestation fund to the Gram Sabhas constituted under FRA to support community forest management for generating livelihoods and wage employment for tribals and forest dwellers to deal with the economic crisis.

- xv. Consider and pass the two vital bills crafted by the All India Kisan Sangarsh Coordination Committee: The Farmers' Freedom from Indebtedness Bill, 2018 and The Farmers' Right to Guaranteed Remunerative Minimum Support Prices for Agricultural Commodities Bill, 2018.

## **6. Technology and Surveillance**

- i. Expand tele-connectivity and 4G internet access on priority in all parts of India. Uphold Net Neutrality and establish internet hotspots in the rural areas especially among the habitations of the vulnerable communities to make sure uninterrupted access to the internet.
- ii. Undertake comprehensive reforms starting with issuance of a SOP as per Supreme Court judgements prior to registration of any cases on social media content, with a nuanced approach with the Personal Data Protection Bill, NCSS and Competition Act working in tandem.
- iii. Reform the website blocking process specifically focussing on removing the opacity existing in regulation.
- iv. Expedite the process on the much needed Data Protection Bill. Ensure that the concerns of civil society and the public are duly incorporated en-route to a comprehensive Data Protection Bill, including the regulation of drones, which currently lies with a Joint Parliamentary Committee.
- v. Rethink usage of intrusive technologies like Facial Recognition and develop foresight and safeguards before deployment:
- vi. Constitute a high level inquiry and make an express statement that malware to target activists and human rights defenders is an illegal act.
- vii. Political Parties should formulate a pro-active code of conduct for their online social media volunteers, integrate it within their training sessions with them and also have penalties for online abuse towards expulsion. They should commit to fair conduct in the use of digital means in election canvassing and online campaigning and adopt a digital rights section in their manifesto.
- viii. Constitutional courts should do a docket review for pending litigations on issues of mass surveillance where there are no pending orders for restraint. This is given the absence of a data protection law or any meaningful surveillance reform. Review the pending cases impacting the constitutional status of Aadhaar given recent notifications and examine ways to expedite their hearings.
- ix. Continued halt of biometric authentication, audit of AePS and use of NREGA payment methods instead.
- x. Halt health linkage to Aadhaar, and commercialisation of health data
- xi. Take action related to starvation deaths caused by tech-caused or tech-exacerbated exclusion.

## **7. Economy**

### **Public Finance and Banking System**

- i. Allow state governments to borrow directly from RBI at repo rate, without conditions, for the rest of the fiscal year.
- ii. Finance the additional spending by borrowing from RBI (deficit financing or monetised deficit).
- iii. Review Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code to prevent corporations from getting undue benefit.
- iv. Revive development banks to fund large scale lending to long term projects. Commercial banks should only be allowed to serve the people by focussing on retail lending.
- v. No public sector bank should be privatised.

## **8. Impact on Vulnerable Communities - Gender, Religion, Caste, Age and Disability**

- i. Ensure autonomous functioning of National and State Commissions for Women with members selected through an institutionalised, independent and transparent process and no political appointees.
- ii. Ensure 33% reservation for women in all commissions.
- iii. Ensure prevention of all crimes against women by providing adequate budget allocation and support survivors of crimes against women. Provide adequate fast track courts to ensure justice in such cases within a legally bound time frame.
- iv. Ensure zero tolerance over rural girls drop out, enrollment in higher studies and also to ensure employability, skill training of rural girls is not affected, especially of the returnee migrants.
- v. Targeted financial support like fee waivers, reimbursement of internet expenses, etc., to Dalits, Adivasis, Bahujans, Pasmandas, transgender and disabled students to access online education. Accessible modes of online education for students with disabilities.
- vi. Urgent action is required to improve the socio-economic conditions of Muslims, especially the most marginalised among them. All basic rights of citizenship - access to health care, education, safe and clean water sanitation, housing - must be provided in a way that is non-discriminatory, sensitive and context-specific
- vii. Treat women as Project Affected Persons in all relief and rehabilitation measures, Ensure legal and financial aid and alternative means of employment and livelihood for women displaced due to infrastructure, urbanisation and industrial projects.
- viii. Physical courts should begin at all levels and the Human Rights Institutions either meet the ANNI standards or they should be closed down.
- ix. Enhance pension to Rs. 3000/for those from 40% to 79% disability; for those with 80% and above Rs. 5000. Provide Rs.5000/- per month to all disabled unemployed during the Covid pandemic crisis.
- x. Disability budgeting across ministries. Minimum 4%.
- xi. Need for the creation of space and platforms for marginalised groups to articulate privacy harms - The concerns of marginalised caste and adivasi groups, women and sexual minorities, informal-gig workers need to be integrated within technology policy. There should be efforts for the active creation of space and leadership development for members of these communities for them to collectively become an integral part of the digital rights ecosystem which is predominantly legalistic, privileged, male and upper caste in India.

## **9. Industry, Labour and Employment**

### Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise

- i. Consider and provide debt restructuring and relief for MSMEs.
- ii. The government must urgently allocate subsidies for the MSME sector, in which the wage subsidy is a major component.
- iii. MSMEs should get priority from the government whenever it creates any support for the industry in the form of economic infrastructure.
- iv. In addition to credit support, income support in the form of a one-time livelihood support not less than Rs. 10,000 must also be provided to city transport sector workers such as auto rickshaw, tempo, including app-based 'gig-workers', etc. Further, the installments of loans from microcredit agencies and NBFC must also be deferred and interest must not be charged for this interim period. In addition, all app-based 'gig-workers' must also get covered under labour law regulations and the government must bring in appropriate policy to enable this.
- v. All street vendors must be identified, recognised and registered as street vendors. The local government bodies must also actively increase awareness about Covid-19 to counter the communalisation of the pandemic and issue special orders to ensure that there is no discrimination on the basis of religion and caste.

### Workforce

- i. All the employees working in COVID 19 ward should be provided with adequate PPE, regular health check-ups and COVID 19 tests; long duty hours need to be reduced and regularised as employees.



- ii. All workers in the healthcare sector, like nurses and ASHA workers, have been at the forefront of fighting Covid-19. All such workers must be regularised to at par with at least D-grade employees of the government. All nurses in the private sector must also receive the same employee benefits as their public sector counterparts.
- iii. Expand the Employees' State Insurance Scheme (ESIS) to include the entire working population in the unorganised sector.
- iv. All contractual workers (including safai karamcharis) should be given special incentive/additional wages for their COVID 19 related work.
- v. All health care and allied workers both permanent and contractual involved in COVID 19 duty should be compensated Rs. 50 lakh if the worker dies and on getting infected they should be given equal treatment facilities without any discrimination.
- vi. Any permanent work being done in any industry must not be done by contract workers. All permanent jobs must be done only by regular employees and therefore the fixed term employment ordinance must be scrapped immediately.
- vii. Creating adequate numbers of permanent posts. All levels of public health system staff be provided with adequate and continued skill training, fair wages, social security and decent working conditions
- viii. The government must pay DA as per regular practice and pay all wages on time.
- ix. RBI must have enough workforce to regulate all the banks and must be held responsible for failing to stop any kind of wrongdoing/fraud/violation by banks supervised by it. Banks should increase their employee base and not rely on third parties and digitalisation alone.

## **10. Workers and Livelihood**

- i. Provide Rs 7,500 per month for 3 months of lockdown as compensation for lost incomes and 3 months after as the economy recovers. Expansion of unemployment benefits to informal sector employees through means-testing. This livelihood support must include all segments of the population, including those both in stigmatised professions like sex work and begging, and in unseen unpaid work such as domestic work.
- ii. Unconditional transfer of Rs 10,000 in the name of women for all the poor rural households with emphasis on single women and female headed households for at least six months.
- iii. Monthly allowance of Rs. 15,000 up to three months be provided in advance, for fishworkers and those engaged in allied activities and develop a proper relief package for the sector in consultation with fish worker organisations.
- iv. Enumerate all the returning migrants, maintain a database, do skill mapping, skill upgradation and create employment programs with the coordination from panchayat level upwards to the district and state level.
- v. Recognize the urban- rural connection of migration cycles. Ensuring portability of ration cards as well as enabling women to gain access to credit on low interest for short term economic needs such as vending, hawking horticulture, poultry etc. is essential.
- vi. Expansion and temporarily relaxing the age limit for attainment of pension via Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana (PM-SYMD) which offers Rs 3,000 pension to informal sector employees.
- vii. Written Employee Contracts should be made mandatory to recognize the population working in the informal sector as contract-based employees with proper tenure.
- viii. Redesign urban and semi-urban settlements in a manner that workplace and residence for most people are close by, self-governance through area sabhas is empowered, and urban natural ecosystems are regenerated and protected through citizens' forums.
- ix. Expand entitlements under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to: increase in the guarantee of work to 200 days per person/entire year, increase in the wage rate to Rs 600/day and at least Rs.300/day as unemployment wages. There is a need to strengthen small towns through a sustainable urban employment guarantee programme and provide initial assistance to states willing to set this up. Budgets for MGNREGA must be increased by at least four times. The Ministry of Labour's orders stating

that all workers should be deemed to be “at work” during the lockdown period and be paid accordingly must apply to MGNREGA workers as well.

- x. Expand National Social Assistance Program as follows: A minimum universal non-contributory pension of 50% of minimum wage for all men and women above the age of 55 years and for all women in vulnerable categories irrespective of age. Index pensions to inflation. Advance payment of double pension for 6 months released in cash to be delivered to each pensioner immediately at her doorstep.
- xi. Formulation of a strong law under the Social Security Code- which is yet to be finalized by the Parliamentary standing committee-, recognizing and ensuring food security, healthcare, housing, maternity and old age benefits as the rights of workers.
- xii. Enact legislation for empowerment of the Transgender community and adequate economic and social support for the LGBTQ community.
- xiii. Registration of workers must be done under the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008, BOCW Act or any other state laws on access of welfare entitlements.
- xiv. The Indian Labour Conference (ILC) must be held urgently to collectively deliberate on labour policies. Workers organisations are ready to understand / have dialogue with the industrial fraternity and concerned government authorities in the spirit of tripartitism and social dialogue to fix the complex question of the economy.

## **11. Civil Liberties, Laws and Governance**

- i. Parliament needs to be convened at earliest to discuss a wide range of issues related to the management of and other aspects related to Covid-19 pandemic.
- ii. NHRC and Supreme Court must issue regular advisories to governments, both Centre and States, to prevent violations as well as direct them to act in the interests of the people, especially the vulnerable and the marginalised.
- iii. CAG needs to take independent review and assessment of the fund allocation announced for COVID-19 management, as also of such fund collections as under PM Care and audit the expenditure under these.
- iv. Institutions of local self-governance must be provided with the resources, technical assistance and other forms of cooperation in order to grow their own local, self-reliant economies, using local and new skills and resources, catering first and foremost to local needs.
- v. Immediately resume the physical functioning of courts. Prioritize the hearing of habeas corpus petitions as it involves the right to life and liberty. Fast-track cases of atrocities against Dalits, Adivasis and other marginalized communities. Enact a detailed and actionable strategic plan for filling up of vacancies in the lower courts and the high courts
- vi. Ensure urgent decentralised monitoring frameworks, grievance redressal mechanisms and penalties for non-implementation of all entitlements.
- vii. Banks including RBI need improved grievances mechanisms, stop harassment of depositors, accountability of top management for the rise in Non Performing Assets, credit to unworthy companies, number of frauds and revolving door policies. Public Sector Banks (PSBs) need to go beyond financial accountability to environmental and social safeguards for loans given to development projects.
- viii. Set up a National Environment Commission with a Constitutional status akin to the CEC and CAG, with the mandate of monitoring adherence of relevant norms and laws by government agencies and corporations, and providing a redressal and interface mechanism for the public.
- ix. Review and revise India’s national climate action plan to ensure widespread participation of communities likely to be most affected to bring in substantial upward revision of goals for mitigation and adaptation, specific target for emission peaking, significantly reducing elite demand for power, and prioritised actions to help climate refugees.
- x. Conduct an impartial investigation in connection with the Delhi riots of February 2020 must be carried out and those found guilty must be held accountable. The real perpetrators of violence must be booked and arrested and prosecuted.

## **Part 2: Better Implementation**

There are several existing laws, entitlements, orders and committees that need to be implemented properly. Here are some of them:

1. Provide full entitlements unconditionally, in advance, for all the eligible mothers under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and Janani Suraksha Yojana. Maternity Entitlements under NFSA: Maternity entitlements under NFSA must be provided to all pregnant and lactating women, without any conditionalities. All the backlog of maternity entitlements must be cleared immediately and for the next six months, the maternity benefit under PMMVY should be given in advance in one instalment. The amount of benefit should be increased and regularly updated according to inflation. Further, legislative provisions need to be made to ensure universal and wage-linked maternity benefits to all women.
2. The Pradhan Manthri Matsya Sampada Yojana Scheme should be relooked into keeping in mind the Standing Committee's recommendations.
3. Implement the Supreme Court order that prisoners senior in age and with co-morbidities should be released with the required conditionalities.
4. Strictly implement provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and implement Sec. 24 which mandates "support (by the government) during natural or man-made disasters and in areas of conflict"; provision of unemployment allowance; caregiver allowance etc.
5. Accept recommendations by the UN Committee on the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities to amend the Indian Constitution to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability; Amend Sec. 3.3 the RPD Act that legitimises discrimination. Speed up certification and Unique Disability ID issuance process.
6. Implementation of the DK Basu Guidelines to the hilt and police cases be filed against errant policemen.
7. Strict implementation of local planning under MGNREGA and account for the payments delay from central government while calculating compensation for delayed compensation( As per the supreme court order). Constitute Social Audit cells and carry out social audits in all states.
8. Social audits to examine ease of use, non-exclusion of people from welfare benefits due to technology.
9. State government must ensure that every primary employer strictly adheres to paying the wages to their contractors and to the workers.
10. Timely distribution every month for pensions to elders accounts by 7th of every month as per Supreme Court order.
11. Implement the full range of ICDS services and child care including growth monitoring, referral services, nutrition and health counselling.
12. Implement the Gram Nyayalaya Act by making appropriate parliamentary and budgetary allocations.
13. Unconditional restoration of the value of secularism in all Institutions and sections of the state apparatus. The spread of hate be checked at all levels.
14. Undertake legal reforms on Internet Shutdowns as per the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the Anuradha Bhasin case. Follow principles of proportionality, absolute necessity and transparency while administering internet shutdowns.
15. Expedite measures to share report and findings of Parliament Standing Committee on IT for the benefit of all parliamentarians.
16. Data Protection Committee should broaden and be transparent about its consultative process on the Data Protection Bill.

### **Part 3: Immediate Withdrawal**

Right before COVID struck the country saw a mass popular uprising against the discriminatory citizenship amendment law. We stand by the original demand to repeal CAA and against the unjust repression and targeting of protestors.

1. Withdraw laws and executive powers activated during lockdown should be withdrawn. People should be counselled for violations not charged punitively. All preventive measures and actions are equitable, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and dignified.
2. Roll back National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 and 2003.
3. Stop the police abuse of the law through fabricated prosecutions and withdraw all the cases against people arrested for anti-CAA protests and arrest the real perpetrators.
4. Withdraw the police state, restore freedom and democracy including ensuring the release of all those arrested, 4G Internet restored and most importantly GoI and Indians urgently listen to the people of J&K as to what they want.
5. Repeal Unlawful Activities Prevention Act with immediate effect.
6. Remove unconstitutional conditionalities in any welfare scheme, including aadhaar.
7. RBI should immediately ask banks to stop all the service charges for saving account holders.
8. Withdraw Draft Fisheries Policy 2020 and resume consultation with stakeholders in all the vernacular languages.
9. Withdraw regressive decisions or proposals such as the Environment Impact Assessment notification, auctioning of coal blocks, sidestepping or fast-tracking of clearances.
10. Abandon Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Yojana.
11. Issue a moratorium on diversion of natural ecosystems for infrastructure, mining, and commercial purposes.

## **AGRICULTURE**

**Sourced from Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch, All India Kisan Sabha and Nation for Farmers**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Agriculture, Farmers, Livelihoods

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. PM Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)
2. PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana
3. PM Jan Dhan Cash transfer
4. Extension of Ujjwala Yojana
5. One Nation One Ration
6. Various state programmes
7. Aatma Nirbhar Bharat: The economic package which claimed to be of Rs 20 lakh crore or 10% of the GDP is a total hoax. The actual expenditure in this package to be borne by the Union Government is only around Rs 2 lakh crore, and the remaining announcements are mostly loan amounts estimated and announced in the previous budgets. In the entire package there is no mention about the genuine demand for income support to peasant households and guaranteed procurement with MSP @ C2 + 50%.

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

So awful is the situation for farming that even fears of Covid-19 and curfews have not deterred farmers from coming out onto the streets in protest. In Maharashtra, for instance, the prices farmers receive for cow milk have plummeted to Rs. 17 a litre (less than the cost of a litre of bottled water) from Rs. 30 a litre pre-lockdown. In the cities, consumers still pay Rs. 48 a litre (sometimes more). Farmers have been emptying hundreds of litres of milk on the streets in protest.

This protest unfolds against the canvas of the central government's clearing the import of 1 million tons of milk powder – which would so obviously lead to complete ruin for milk farmers across the country. And the government's decision to import milk and milk products from the USA, in exchange for the export of generic medicines to that country.

The impact of COVID has come upon Indian agriculture when it was already reeling from the effects of the neoliberal economic policies, resulting in falling farm incomes and stagnant wage rates. The unplanned lockdown which came at the time of the rabi harvests resulted in disruptions and losses to farmers as well as agricultural workers. For many, their crops lay rotting in the field because there was no labour available to conduct the harvest. For many others, who managed to complete the harvest – there was no transportation available to reach their agents or markets. Agriculture confronted both demand as well as supply side constraints. States which rely on migrant agricultural labourers for harvesting and mandi operations suffered shortage, as a result there was slowing down of the processes. The procurement of food grains in the APMC mandis saw a huge decline. Data shows that in the first phase of the lockdown there was a 94 per cent decline in procurement of food grain as compared to the same period last year. Perishable commodities like fruits and vegetables suffered the greatest losses due to lack of storage facilities. Poultry farmers and milk producers were at the receiving end of crashing prices. As a result farmers

are faced with a cash constraint situation for the upcoming season for investing in either farming or other livelihood activities and lack of access to institutional sources of credit. However, the government response instead of providing immediate relief to farmers are seeing this as an opportune moment to infuse large scale reforms with a view towards greater privatisation.

In this period of pandemic when all forms of democratic deliberations are stalled, the central government has decided to bring in crucial ordinances which have deep ramifications for the country's agricultural toiling masses. Overriding the Constitutional prerogatives of the state governments, the central government has announced three upcoming ordinances related to agricultural marketing and commerce. These provide the central government sweeping powers to annul all state specific related legislations. Three crucial amendments: (i) The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation ) Ordinance 2020 (ii) The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance 2020 (iii) The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance 2020

These legislations have negative implications for farmers' incomes. The ordinances by deregularising agricultural markets, reduces the ambit of APMCs and provides private players a free run for purchasing farmers' produce without assuring MSPs.

Similarly, the proposed amendment to the ECA will open the floodgates for hoarding of essential commodities, and threaten food security of the country. Further, the ulterior motive of such an amendment is to attract FDI and private investment into agricultural supply chains, storage infrastructure, processing industries. Furthermore, the proposals to amend the Electricity Act and its clause to scrap cross subsidy will increase the burden of irrigation costs for small and marginal peasants as this will lead to a multi-fold rise in tariff rates.

Additionally, the central government plans to privatise coalfields and auction them to private players. Many of these identified coal fields across nine coal producing states of the country are located in forested areas which are ecologically sensitive. Concerns of displacement of tribal communities living here and their loss of farm lands have been raised by the Bhumi Adhikar Andolon. Pradhans of many of these gram panchayats have also written to the PM against the move. This has led to building a joint worker-peasant resistance against privatisation of coal fields.

These reforms fail to look at the existing inequalities of the Indian countryside or provide any economic or social security. The COVID period has heightened food and nutrition insecurity - around the start of July, it was estimated that food grain buffer stock was around 91 million tons – in the very period that Indians have been hungrier than they have been in half a century. This exposes the intention of the Government - to shore up market prices rather than moderate them. Moreover, with NREGA halted in several states, farmers are unable to meet their livelihood needs. Women farmers have also taken a severe hit socially and economically– several reports from across the country report an increased lack of access to social security entitlements such as ration, pension, government schemes, etc., reports also indicate an increase in violence against women and in many states more and more women are being put out of work due to reverse migration. In the post COVID period agrarian distress and inequalities related to capitalist development have intensified.

The linked concerns of the migrant workers and the workers at large are also not unrelated to the agrarian situation. The plight of the returning migrants from the cities, and increasing unemployment

has a direct impact on rural household incomes as most of the workforce is made of migrant workers moving from the villages to the cities, as a result of the increasing agrarian distress. A huge proportion of farms in India are dependent on such remittances to meet the costs of running the farm. At harvest time, those migrant members might get a share of the produce. With the lockdown not only did remittances collapse, millions of those migrants began returning home – putting further pressure on food expenses of already bankrupted households. The reliance of small and marginal peasants on non-farm employments has become greater.

### **List of Demands:**

#### **1. Food and nutritional security and cash transfers:**

- Universalise and expand PDS with immediate effect for the next six months. Expand it to include nutritious food like, dals, pulses, oil, sugar and potatoes and onions for example.
- To address women's increased workload, strengthen community kitchens through seed/financial grants to women's groups and ensure income for women collective to cook food at anganwadis for community feeding
- Unconditional transfer of Rs 10,000 in the name of women for all the poor rural households with emphasis on single women and female headed households for at least six months. The 500/- under Jan Dhan was inadequate and outreach was poor as Jandhan accounts not held by several women as pointed through a recent study of MAKAAAM
- Transfer NREGS wages for the lost 25-30 days at minimum wages to all NREG active workers.
- Improve bank access through bank mitras or correspondents

#### **2. Employment and Livelihood Support:**

- Addition 100 days to MGNREGA to compensate for the lost days
- Issuance of job cards of a priority basis to those who do not have them
- Identify common lands such as forests, village commons and ensure that all landless women are provided access to these lands for their needs and for NREGS
- Enumerate all the returning migrants, maintain a database, do skill mapping, skill upgradation and create employment programs with the coordination from panchayat level upwards to the district and state level.
- Recognize the urban- rural connection of migration cycles. Ensuring portability of ration cards as well as enabling women to gain access to credit on low interest for short term economic needs such as vending, hawking horticulture, poultry etc. is essential.
- Remunerative Minimum Support Price for all crops at C2+50% with guaranteed procurement.
- Employment at minimum wage of Rs 600/day to all agricultural workers.
- Income support of at least Rs,7,500/- per month to all non-tax paying poor.
- At least Rs.300/day as unemployment wages under MGNREGA.

- Increase of PM-KISAN to Rs.18,000/- per year and extending benefits to tenant farmers also and complete loan waiver for landless, tenant, small and middle peasants

### 3. Other economic activities

- Provide seeds and fertilisers with immediate effect and free of cost on a priority basis to women farmers, especially those who are single.
- Access to interest free credit. Crop credit coverage is very low and that can be improved this season with complete interest subvention.
- Ensure access to guaranteed prices and markets at the village level for diverse crops,
- Open up government spaces for storage facilities and issue guidelines for the same
- Provide bridge funds for FPOs and women's collectives
- Women collective run Custom Hiring Centers (CHC) ensuring access of women friendly tools and equipment at Panchayat level to women farmers
- Expand Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) to include landless women **who are leasing land.**
- Joint liability groups (JLGs), a model successful in Kerala and few other states could be strengthened by bringing JLGs to be brought on par with kisan credit cards in terms of interest, insurance and other terms and conditions. This could be useful for numerous enterprise ideas floated by skilled returning-migrants
- Expand PM Kisaan Sanman Nidhi to include women farmers/irrespective of land holding and increase the amount from 6000/year to 15000/- which would support in farming activities that cannot be covered under NREGA
- Emphasise on nutrition and food security based integrated agro-ecological agriculture and introduce mechanisms that support the availability of seed and other inputs to align with that
- Ensure access to forests and commons, remove restrictions for forest dependent workers
- Ensure access to grazing lands to livestock workers, feed, infrastructure, health care for all livestock needs to be provided. Common lands, banjar and poramboke lands have to be surveyed and reclaimed from those who have encroached on those lands and have to be handed over to the gram panchayats for grazing animals and growing fodder for livestock and for common use.
- Ensure zero tolerance over rural girls drop out, enrollment in higher studies and also to ensure employability, skill training of rural girls is not affected, especially of the returnee migrants.

### 4. Policies and Legislation:

- Convene special session of Parliament and State Assemblies to discuss COVID-19 related issues impacting the agrarian sector
  - Consider and pass the two vital bills crafted by the All India Kisan Sangarsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC): The Farmers' Freedom from Indebtedness bill, 2018 and The Farmers' Right to Guaranteed Remunerative Minimum Support Prices for Agricultural Commodities Bill, 2018.

### 5. Other Demands:

- **Discuss and highlight the mega-water crisis engulfing the country** - against the shadow of a terrible drought devastating farming in several states. Indeed, not just on rainfall problems but the basic class, caste and gender inequalities that pervade water control and



consumption in this country. **To create equal control and access, particularly to the landless.**

- **Listen to testimonies of the victims of the agrarian crisis** from different parts of the country. And how policies beyond their control have devastated farming in India, such as the surging privatisation of health and education, have crushed farmers and all the rural poor. Revitalize public participation in decision making on land use, land acquisition and agriculture related infrastructure. Make institutions publicly accountable.
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### **Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:**

1. Livestock economy can provide for organic matter and crop protection and ensure sustainable livelihood. After the advent of green revolution in late-1960s and economic liberalization in early-1990s, there occurred a shift away from multifunctional agriculture. There is a reduction in complementary and supplementary enterprises contributing to productivity and incomes. Farmers are gaining income from monocultures and fewer enterprises.
2. Policy support for integrated farming system and its components is an urgent need. Farmers need support with information, knowledge and inputs from agricultural research and extension system for the adoption of models of agriculture specific to agroclimatic zones. Public investment in agricultural research and extension system for enabling farmers with information and technology for local production of inputs viz., seeds, compost and biofertilizers and crop protection products and with group farming to reduce risk and access to resources for sustainable agriculture.
3. Farmers need to cope with three basic risks related to yield, price and vulnerability connected with the relations of resources-in-use in the system of production and social reproduction. The rising yield risks are: weather and input risk. Weather related risks include late onset of monsoon, low and untimely rainfall. Pest and disease risks are on the rise. Major input risks are emergent on account of availability of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation, farm machinery, credit, information and knowledge and labour. The cost of cultivation has been on the rise. The price risks are related to output marketing, which include price volatility, non-operational Minimum Support Price (MSP) system, and discrimination in price realization. Risk reduction and spreading is a necessity. There are growing risks related to rising costs of health and living, weakening non-farm employment opportunities and unreliable system of public procurement and food distribution.
4. Strategies for enhancing income can aim at reducing costs through the promotion of integrated farming systems approach, balanced nutrient management, critical moisture availability, watershed management in dry land areas, investment in and development of institutions for collective leveraging of water resources and management of flood prone areas, provision of investment subsidy for local production of farm inputs-green manuring, bio-fertilizers, biogas and use of renewable energy sources, animal husbandry / livestock rearing by providing support for cattle sheds and maintaining and ensuring access to common grazing lands, and so on. The government should abandon the move of opening of domestic market to heavily subsidized imports of milk and poultry products to stabilize incomes in rural economy.
5. The petty producers are being forced to abandon their traditional livelihoods linked to the crop and cattle economy, artisanal production and food processing. Livestock economy faces

a major challenge from the ascent of right-wing majoritarian politics promoting conservative social norms of cow protection. Most of these petty producers come from the strata of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), Muslims and other Backward Classes (OBCs). It is an assault of a new kind, requiring a new approach to the mobilization of peasantry and security of livelihoods in the countryside.

6. Attempts to restrict the space and scope for democracy through the promotion of basic minimum education criteria for fighting panchayat elections, a two-child norm and several other bizarre eligibility conditions for standing for elections. The regressive agenda is also under perusal of Aadhaar-based identity linkage for the delivery of essential services, transfer of available state support (subsidies for food and nutrition, agricultural input and banking services, and social security), all of which mostly hurt petty producers and workers.
7. As early as 2018, Nation for Farmers was demanding the holding of a special session of parliament to discuss the agrarian crisis and its related issues. It seems to us now that we need to aim much higher than that. Covid-19 has performed an incredible autopsy that lays bare in minute detail – among other things – the Great Indian Crisis of Inequality, unprecedented levels of it, and its impact on the poor and the marginalised.

## **BANKING**

**Sourced from Centre for Financial Accountability**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Banking Finance

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. Moratorium on loans for 6 months
2. Removal of bank charges for not maintaining minimum balance and ATM charges for 3 months
3. Credits schemes to MSMEs, NBFCs, HFCs, MFIs, DISCOMs

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

1. Moratorium on loans is only a temporary pause on the payments, borrowers will have to pay the loans with increased tenure of EMIs along with the interest. Banks are also not providing the moratorium facility to all applying for it. RBI does not have a mechanism to ensure that banks implement the moratorium facility with no discrepancies.
2. Despite the announcement by Finance Minister to not penalise the bank account holders for not maintaining minimum balance and take ATM charges for 3 months, banks have not followed it in spirit. Banks deducted charges for not maintaining the minimum balance, and the small amounts of money deposited in bank accounts of registered workers by various governments has faced the brunt of it, with workers reporting that banks deducted the money deposited by the government through bank charges.
3. Micro, small and medium businesses facing liquidity crunch are being asked to take loans instead of direct monetary relief. Banks write off the loans of big corporates but MEMEs and retail borrowers are facing the hardship, even during the worst pandemic they have not only provided with a moratorium with no cancellation of interests.
4. States governments need financial support but are forced to borrow at higher rates from market and other sources instead of borrowing from central bank at repo rate.
5. Instead of delving measures to fully support the people and businesses in such an unforeseen crisis, the measures announced by the central bank of India are merely a bandage on the wounds

**List of Demands:**

1. Instead of leaving it to the banks, Reserve Bank of India should form a dedicated committee to ensure that all the COVID relief measures are implemented by banks completely.
2. To ease the suffering of the people and MSMEs, RBI should announce the interest waiver on the loans during the pandemic period and Central government should compensate for it.
3. States are raising funds at high interest rates from markets, RBI should initiate direct lending to states at repo rate.

4. RBI should immediately ask banks to stop all the service charges for saving account holders.
5. **Write offs:** Given a negligible recovery of loans that have been written off by banks, Govt should make stringent laws to recover the bad loans. Writing off of large credits should be supervised by the parliament; strict laws should be made with regard to writing off of large loans.
6. Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code should be reviewed immediately. Corporations should not get benefit from the IBC process by buying companies at throwaway prices, leaving behind banks with huge losses.
7. **Accountability of the Management:** The top management of the banks should be held accountable for their actions such as the rise in NPAs by issuing credits to unworthy companies, the increasing number of frauds, appointments of chairpersons and top executives of banks immediately after their retirement in private companies which have benefited from the banks etc.
8. **Recruitment:** Banks have stopped appointing representative of the employees in their boards due to their continuous objections to anti-people policies. Employees' representatives should be appointed in all banks. The outsourcing of banking activities through contracts to third party have led to rise in cases of frauds with no liability attached to third party contractors. Banks are also pushing for digitalisation, systemically excluding a large number of people who do not have knowledge of technology or resources to access digital banking services. Banks should increase their employee base and not rely on third parties and digitalisation alone.
9. **Environment and Social Safeguards:** Public Sector Banks (PSBs) needs to go beyond financial accountability. There is no contestation that depositors are primary financiers and stakeholders of the PSBs. That includes all account holders, including those who might be losing their land, displaced, run into health risks because of the projects funded by the banks. The largescale projects have also repeatedly violated environmental laws, causing in many places irreversible damage to ecosystems. Hence as public institutions with investments in developmental projects, banks should have environment and social safeguard.
10. **Development Banks:** Development Banks should be brought back for large scale lending to long term projects. Scheduled commercial banks should only be allowed to serve the people by focussing on retail lending.
11. **Bank Merger and Privatisation:** The mergers of banks done in recent years has not yielded any positive results. Though it has increased the limit of amount that banks can lend to single borrowers, increasing the risk of rise in bad loans of corporations. The track record of private banks in India has been very poor, be it before nationalisation of banks in 1969 or post nationalisation period with latest example of failure of Yes Bank when State Bank of India and Life Insurance Cooperation of India, both public sector institutions were asked to invest large amount of money to save the private bank. In order to maximise the profits, private banks often violate rules and RBI guidelines posing series threats to depositors' savings. No public sector bank should be privatised.
12. As a regulator of all banks, RBI must have enough workforce to regulate all the banks. At present, RBI issues guidelines and leave it to the banks to follow them. As a regulator, RBI must be held responsible for failing to stop any kind of wrongdoing/fraud/violation by banks supervised by it.
13. Grievances mechanisms of all banks as well as RBI should be improved and no depositors should be harassed unnecessarily.

**Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:**

1. To demand transparency in public finance institutions – details of their investments, list of wilful defaulters, accounts of written off NPAs should be made public.
2. Banks should not have discretionary power to write off loans higher than a certain specified amount, parliament should supervise the process of writing off of large credits.
3. Given that banks are being run with the money deposited by people, no bank should charge the depositors for doing basic banking transactions.
4. Implement recommendations of Standing Committee on Finance on Non-Performing Assets.

## CIVIL LIBERTIES AND DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

Sourced from People's Union for Civil Liberties

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Civil Liberties, Democratic Rights, Human Rights, Law, Constitution

### **Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

The last five months (due to the lock down imposed in the context of controlling the spread of COVID 19) has accelerated manifold the tectonic shifts that were taking place in the last five years to Indian democracy. Our constitutional values of secularism, liberty, fraternity, free speech and equality before the law have been consistently and severely undermined. Important democratic institutions of the State i.e. the Parliament, the Judiciary and others have not prevented, and at times enabled the process of changing the character of the Indian State, as enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

1. **Ram Janmabhoomi:** On the 5th August the PM led the state sponsored Ram Janmabhoomi puja in Ayodhya. It was not an accident that the date for the Janma bhoomi puja was the 5th of August, also the one year anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370, but a clear intent to establish that secularism as a value, where all religions stand equally will not be the norm now in India, but now one single religion will dominate with the political exclusion of other faiths.
2. **J & K, One year:** The last one year for the Kashmir valley has consisted of the Central Government's use of force along with the indiscriminate use of section 144. For more than six months- communications has been forcibly restricted due to undemocratic and unconstitutional orders of the Central Government, there has been widespread detention of political leaders, intellectuals and activists, there has been state supervision over media, fundamental laws including domicile and land acquisition laws have been amended in the midst of a raging pandemic. The rise in local militancy is demonstrative of the fact that the promise of the abrogation of 370 resulting in peace and development is a perversion of truth.
3. **Attack on Equal Citizenship:** The nationwide democratic, creative and peaceful protests for equal citizenship, against the Citizenship Laws and Rules (CAA, NPR, NRC) came under violent attack in Delhi in February and folded up unceremoniously in the rest of the country, during the lockdown.
  - (a) **Arrest of Innocent Protestors and Dissenters:** The Delhi police under the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is investigating the Delhi riots that led to the killing of 53 persons, seriously injuring hundreds of people, destructing livelihoods and personal properties has led a biased investigation in the midst of a pandemic. The investigation is attempting to criminalize the constitutional right to protest and dissent, by conflating it with conspiracy to riot. Laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967 are being used to suppress dissent.
  - (b) In Uttar Pradesh, the protests were violently dealt with by the UP Police through the months of December, January and February. Apart from loss of lives in several districts of UP, arrests of a large number of young protestors, including lawyers, retired policemen, activists, poets were pursued. Undignified methods like naming them publicly in order to make them feel socially vulnerable.

4. The UAPA, since its expansion and amendments as a terror law has been used indiscriminately to silence and incarcerate dissenters, those who hold a different view. With draconian provisions of 30 days judicial custody, 180 days to file a chargesheet and no bail, is being used by the present Government maliciously to silence people through incarceration. The Bhima Koregaon Case of Pune since 2018, now under the NIA, continues to be the bogey to indiscriminately crackdown dissenters under the UAPA, therefore the arrests and interrogation of activists intellectuals, cultural artists continues stridently. Similarly we have seen that in the Delhi riots, more than 17 people have been arrested under the UAPA and hundreds interrogated.
5. **The muzzling of dissent and the criminalising the Media:** According to a report by the Rights & Risks Analysis Group titled **India: Media's Crackdown During COVID-19 Lockdown, between 25th March and 31st of May, more than 55** journalists faced arrest, registration of FIRs, summons or show causes notices, physical assaults, alleged destruction of properties and threats for reportage on COVID-19 or exercising freedom of opinion and expression during the national lockdown. from 25 March to 31 May 2020.” The highest number of attacks on journalists was reported from Uttar Pradesh (11 journalists), followed by Jammu & Kashmir (6 journalists), Himachal Pradesh (5), four each in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Odisha, Maharashtra, two each in Punjab, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh & Kerala and one each in Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Nagaland and Telangana. the sections that reporters were charge with included violation of the Epidemic Act, NDMA and the IPC sections of conspiracy, sedition and the UAPA
6. **The Criminalising of ordinary people :** The implementation of the National Disaster Management Act, The Epidemic Act, restraining sections of the CrPC, MV Act and the indiscriminate use of section 144 has affected the lives of ordinary working class persons of the country. The numbers are huge of criminal cases imposed under these laws and fines charged. In just the State of Rajasthan during a few months of lockdown more than 4 lakh 60 thousand people were booked under the epidemic act for violating the norms and with more than 7 crore rs collected as fines. More than 3,584 FIRs were lodged and 7649 people were arrested. More than 14 crore rupees collected as fines under the Motor Vehicle act for violating the Section 144. Under the restraining sections of the CrPC, more than 25,000 people were arrested for breaching peace and restrained. Similarly, 219 people were booked under the IT Act for hate content and 219 cases were lodged and around 300 people arrested for violation of social media norms.
7. **Prisons Decongestion :** The most important and suo moto directives of the SC during the lock down related to decongestion of prisons. High powered committee were required to be set up in every state, which had to work towards ensuring the release and granting of parole between 4 to 6 weeks to convicted prisoners. **By and large, this** directive remained unimplemented even cases of high co-morbidities related to COVID 19. and despite the spread of COVID inside the jails, the prisoners were not given this relief and human dignity. The case of 81 year old Vara Vara Rao, stands out who is now undergoing serious neurological problems apart from testing positive. It was a national campaign that resulted in his admission to a private hospital. Similarly the case of 100 percent disabled Saibaba, in Nagpur Jail who was not granted any relief even when his mother was on death bed. Complete opaqueness exists as far as the prison department's release of data relating to the spread of the disease in the individual prisons

8. **Encounters and the police and courts:** With norms of public debate and transparency norms being beyond the pale of police stations and police action, Custodial torture, deaths and encounters are not even being reported and discussed.
9. **The Silence of the Courts and the NHRC and other Human Rights Institutions:** The Courts were inaccessible due to the lockdown due to its functioning shifting completely online. This resulted in ordinary people being pushed to the margins for any kind of access and relief via courts. Institutions like the NHRC, SC Commission, ST Commission did not take suo-moto cognizance of the extent of suffering faced by communities and drive an agenda for their protection.

### **List of Demands:**

1. Unconditional restoration of the value of secularism in all institutions and sections of the state apparatus.
2. Restore freedom and democracy in action in all parts of Jammu and Kashmir, including ensuring the release of all political detainees, restoration of 4G and providing democratic platforms for dialogue
3. The disturbing violence that took place in Delhi and other parts of the country, that emanated from the politically manufactured polarization of peaceful, democratic and constitutional protests against the CAA must be thoroughly and justly investigated in a fair and politically unbiassed manner. The investigation must not be politically used to suppress dissent, in the manner it currently is
4. Withdrawal of the CAA amendments of 2019 and 2003
5. UAPA be repealed with immediate effect.
6. Prisoners senior in age and with co-morbidities should be released with the required conditionalities.
7. Implementation of the DK Basu Guidelines and filing of police cases against errant policemen.
8. Restart the functioning of physical courts at all levels and functioning of the Human Rights Institutions following the ANNI standards



## **DALIT AND ADIVASI RIGHTS**

**Sourced from National Campaign on Human Dalit Rights, All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch, National Dalit Movement for Justice, SASY, RIGHTS**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Dalit Rights, Adivasi Rights, Access to Entitlements, Discrimination

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. Insurance cover for health workers
2. Double food entitlements through PDS
3. Loan repayment relaxations for farmers
4. Direct benefit transfers for Jan Dhan account holders (especially women)
5. DBT for workers in the unorganized sector
6. DBT for senior citizens, widows and PwDs
7. Increase in MNREGA wages and additional charges
8. Collateral-free loan facility through SHGs
9. Construction workers' benefit
10. Disability pension
11. DBT through PM Kisan scheme
12. Regular visits by health workers to marginalized settlements
13. Three meals to be provided to shelters for homeless persons and migrant workers
14. Regular sanitization of residential settlements
15. Benefit of 24% EPF in organized sector
16. Insurance cover under PM-JAY
17. Free LPG cylinders under Udyami Yojana

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

1. The community has suffered from extensive loss of jobs, which has resulted in limited wages and salaries accessible
2. Workers are suffering from jeopardized safety at the workplace
3. A majority of informal sector workers are casual, self-employed, and migrant population, and belong to the Dalit, Adivasi, Pasmanda and Bahujan communities. They share congested spaces and live in slums and ghettos. Severely restricted means of sanitation and hygiene makes home quarantine an almost impractical preventive measure. Poor living conditions for people living in quarantine centres and shelter homes with inadequate food and safe drinking water has made them very vulnerable to the spread of COVID 19.
4. There is a heightened risk of health hazards for people involved in unhygienic occupations like sanitation workers, low to medium level public health workers.
5. The impossibility of stocking food for people with meagre income and sanitation kits not accessible to people in low-income households, has affected their health and nutrition profile
6. Caste atrocities on SCs, especially Dalit women have risen significantly during Covid-19 with no immediate redressal system
7. People, especially from Dalit, Pasmanda and Bahujan communities, who have been previously involved in any kind of protests against the state (eg. Anti-CAA protests) are being targeted under the garb of violating existing law and order related to the lockdown.

There continues to be widespread political targeted state action against 'accused' offenders of lockdown-related laws

8. There is a higher risk of mental health concerns and suicides among Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, especially among further marginalized groups within these communities
9. Lack of internet access deprives students from continuing their education. A lack of hostel facilities deprives them from a conducive environment to study. Absence of targeted financial aid for higher education students will force them to drop out in search of employment.
10. Despite the SC recommendations many states have not implemented delivering midday meals to children's home during the lockdown. This will adversely affect health and well-being of thousands of children from the marginalised communities
11. Decrease in salaries; loss of jobs at mass-level; on-the-field jobs like home delivery services, transport services; disproportionate burden on self-employed groups like domestic workers, SMEs, and absence of distinct safety and insurance plans leads to making workers vulnerable
12. Lack of awareness around Covid-19 in regional and sign languages, inaccessible information on Covid-19 for people with visual and hearing impairments also aids exclusion

#### **List of Demands:**

1. Ensure that all preventive measures and actions taken to counter the effects of COVID are equitable, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and dignified.
2. Build social security measures (pensions), unemployment allowances for a defined period of time post the pandemic for marginalized/informal sector/ self-employed/ casual workers in order to help them re-stabilize their lives.
3. Increase the number of testing centres and their capacity to ensure that samples are taken from all such settlements which typically accommodate marginalized communities so that the scale of infections are detected by the State early enough to make arrangements for quarantine and care/treatment.
4. Provide accessible and targeted health services for people with disabilities, co-morbidities and senior citizens.
5. Make awareness on Covid-19 more accessible for linguistic diversities (including sign language users) and people with visual impairments.
6. State-funded and institutionally supported mental health support services for marginalized groups must be provided
7. Targeted financial support like fee waivers, reimbursement of internet expenses, etc., to Dalits, Adivasis, Bahujans, Pasmandas, transgender and disabled students should be provided to access online education. The State must build accessible modes of online education for students with disabilities.
8. The State must provide adequate living conditions in shelter homes and quarantine centres
9. The State must put an end to politically-motivated and targeted attacks on people from marginalized groups

## **Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:**

### **Recommendations to accountability bodies:**

1. Release political prisoners who have been involved in various protests before the lockdown.
2. Build a mechanism to ensure that private companies do not exploit low and medium level employees, a large proportion of whom are from the dalit and Adivasi community
3. Direct private companies to provide Covid-19 specific insurance covers to all their employees. This should include extending extra safety measures for workers involved in delivery services that involve direct public dealing
4. Regular sanitization and assessment of living conditions of slums and other settlements for marginalized groups
5. Establish internet hotspots in the rural areas especially among the habitations of the vulnerable communities to make sure they have uninterrupted access to education conducted online

### **Calls for solidarity and appeals:**

Appeal to activists, CSOs and networks across various social movements to initiate and actively engage in cross-movement dialogues and collectively advocate for intersectional groups who are often left behind if we don't come out of our silos based on singular identities.

## **DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**

**Sourced from Rethink Aadhaar, Internet Freedom Foundation and Article 21**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Digital Technology, Digital and Civil Rights, Exclusion, Surveillance, Fundamental Rights, Aadhar

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. **Access** : GramNet (PIB Release dated August 26)
2. **Contact tracing** : Launch of Aarogya Setu (Per Prime Ministers Conference with Chief Ministers PIB Release dated Jun. 17): Lockdown guide The lockdown guidelines initially made Aarogya Setu mandatory, later reduced to a direction to ensure that this is rolled out on a “best effort basis”
3. **Innovation** : Digital India AatmaNirbhar Bharat App Innovation Challenge (PIB Release dated July 12)
4. **Lending** : PM SVANidhi Portal launch (PIB Release dated June 29)
5. **Platform Accountability and Data Protection** (PIB Release dated July 22)
6. **Remote learning** : ATL App Development Module (PIB Release dated July 11)
7. **Remote learning** : One Nation One Digital Program (PIB Release dated June 27)
8. In light of the pandemic, many state governments and government offices announced a halt in biometric authentication.
9. Non-personal data committee released its report, which encourages wider sharing of non-personal data to derive economic value and for other purposes like national security, to deal with pandemic, prevention of crimes etc. (all of which raise genuine concerns of greater surveillance)
10. The Joint Parliament Committee studying the Personal Data Protection Bill held its first meeting towards the end of July, for the first time since the imposition of the first lockdown. As per reports, in the meeting, several government agencies, including the Home Secretary, NIA, NCRB as well as the Census Commissioner justified those provisions of the Bill which give wide powers to the government to exempt government agencies from provisions of the Bill. As per reports, the agencies used the pandemic to justify such examples and even collection of data for NPR and NRC was cited as a justification.
11. Despite a Supreme Court order mandating periodic review of imposition of slower internet speeds in Kashmir, there has been a mechanical extension of 2G services without due application of mind to problems being faced by people to access information and services in the midst of a pandemic.

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Tech-exacerbated Social exclusion:</b> The pandemic exacerbated the social exclusion caused by badly designed digital and technological interventions. During this period, we have noted an increase in the mandatory use of Aadhaar, in contravention of the Supreme Court’s 2018 Puttuswamy judgement on Aadhaar:</li></ol> |
|---|

- (a) **PDS:** Aadhaar continues to remain a [source of exclusion](#). Tragically, there has been a rise in the reported starvation deaths ([RTF Odisha](#)) (ii) During the migrant crisis there were reports that Aadhaar was being demanded for train tickets. (iii) In Delhi, for issuance of Temporary Ration Cards to those not already possessing one, a web based registration required Aadhaar details to be uploaded.. (iv) The Government of Kerala has made Aadhaar mandatory for state job applicants; and to create an account in the Integrated Local Governance Management (ILGMS) system (v) Using the migrant crisis as impetus, the government announced the [One Nation One Ration Card](#) will be rolled out in 2021. The stated intention is to ensure portability of ration cards using “technological solutions. However this is likely to cause massive disruptions in a system that has already been ravaged by Aadhaar linkage and is also [highly unlikely](#) that this will solve the issue of portability of rations.
- (b) **Health:** Increased use of technology for health-related surveillance, and moves towards building a health-related database: (i) Aarogya Setu was the Indian government’s contact tracing app, developed in March 2020. However this was criticized for collecting excess data of users, contrary to global norms on contact tracing apps, including the solution being jointly offered by Google and Apple. (ii) Aadhaar has been required for medical interventions, including for COVID tests. (iii) The pandemic has also seen the Ministry of Health push for the [digitisation of health records](#), as part of developing a “[Health Stack](#),”. Several commercial actors are interested in this, many of whom have been linked to iSpirt.
- (c) **Proposed Databases:** (i) [National Migrant Information System](#) provides for states to collect data on movement of migrant workers. Currently this is justified on grounds of enabling contact tracing for purpose of Covid, but later it can extend to surveillance and such data can also be later commercialized. (ii) NPR exercise - although halted for the time being, is likely to resume next year.
- (d) **Poorly Designed (AePS) Aadhaar-Enabled Payments System:** The most common reason for delays in payment was the lack of bank details and Aadhaar numbers for India’s estimated 5.3 crore [construction workers](#), suggesting Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s much-touted “Digital India” campaign to enable cashless payments has let down millions of the country’s poorest citizens at a time when they needed it the most.
- (e) **Aadhaar in Education:** The pandemic and social distancing has increased the use of technology for education, and exacerbated the inequities caused by unequal access to technology: (i) Aadhaar is mandatory for the GoI’s Digilocker initiative, and the Class 12 CBSE results could not be accessed without Aadhaar. (ii) Aadhaar for school admissions continues unabated across several states. (iii) College admissions: the Government of Telanagana’s Degree Online Services ([DOST](#)) [mandates Aadhaar seeding](#) for prospective students to enrol. The only permissible alternative is for the prospective students to undergo [facial recognition](#).
2. **Aarogya Setu is being made a pre-condition for access to livelihood and employment:** (i) Aarogya Setu made mandatory for entry to Delhi District Court: ([link](#)) (ii) Aarogya Setu’s use for air travel: ([link](#))(iii) RWAs and Aarogya Setu: An anti-privacy combination ([link](#))
  3. **Digital Censorship through blanket App Bans:** (i) Blanket App Ban Guidelines: ([link](#)) (ii) 59 Apps banned on June 29 2020: ([link](#))
  4. **Growth in tracking and surveillance technologies in absence of a data protection law, and parliamentary discourse:** (i) Facial Recognition Technology deployment: ([link](#)) (ii) Drones regulation: ([link](#)) (iii) Delhi Police’s use of drones for surveillance: ([link](#)) (iv) Surveillance through Call Data Records: ([link](#))

5. **Internet shutdowns:** (i) Internet shutdowns in Jammu and Kashmir: ([link 1](#)) and ([link 2](#)) (ii) Internet shutdowns in the North-East of India: ([link](#))
6. **Lack of Internet Access:** (i) Poor access to Internet in A&N Islands: ([link](#)) (ii) Lack of 4G access in remote parts of Odisha: ([link](#))
7. **Use of malware to target activists and human rights defenders:** (i) Large scale phishing and malware attacks and vulnerabilities in India: ([link](#)) (ii) NSO Group comes up with new tools pitched towards governments: ([link](#))
8. **Website blocking :** (i) Environmental awareness and activism blocked in an act of opaque censorship: ([link](#)) (ii) Privacy-friendly search engine DuckDuckGo blocked: ([link](#)) (iii) Arbitrary blocking of WeTransfer: ([link](#)) (iv) Whistleblower provides blocking orders for over 4000 websites: ([link](#))

### List of Demands:

1. **Tech-exacerbated Social exclusion:** (i) Social audits to examine ease of use, non-exclusion (ii) Aadhaar to be delinked from welfare benefits.
2. **Aarogya Setu :** (i) Make a law as per the right to privacy judgement to regulate Aarogya Setu which should be completely voluntary ([link 1](#)) and ([link 2](#)) (ii) Engage with the parliamentary machinery through correspondence with the Parliamentary Committee on IT with the aim of keeping them updated about current and impending security and privacy issues: ([link](#))
3. **Digital Censorship:** (i) Undertake comprehensive reforms starting with issuance of a SOP as per Supreme Court judgements prior to registration of any cases on social media content. ([link](#)) (ii) Avoid drastic and patchy measures. Approach the issue with a nuanced approach with the Personal Data Protection Bill, NCSS and Competition Act working in tandem. ([link](#))
4. **Surveillance:** (i) Ensure that the concerns of civil society and the public are duly incorporated en-route to a comprehensive Data Protection Bill, which currently lies with a JPC. ([link](#)) (ii) Build in privacy safeguards into proposed laws aimed at regulating drones. ([link](#)) (iii) Rethink usage of intrusive technologies like Facial Recognition and develop foresight and safeguards before deployment: ([link 1](#)) ([link 2](#))
5. **Internet shutdowns :** (i) Undertake legal reforms as per the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the Anuradha Bhasin case. ([link 1](#)) and ([link 2](#)) (ii) Follow principles of proportionality, absolute necessity and transparency while administering internet shutdowns: ([link](#))
6. **Lack of Internet Access :** (i) Expand tele-connectivity and 4G internet access on priority in all parts of India ([link](#)) (ii) IFF's recommendations to TRAI to uphold Net Neutrality, and improve Internet Access: ([link](#))
7. **Use of malware to target activists and human rights defenders:** (i) Constitute a high level inquiry and make an express statement that this is an illegal act. (i) Expedite the process on the much needed Data Protection Bill (iii) Ensure there is parliamentary dialogue and oversight on such issues so that such threats can be checked in real-time. ([link 1](#)), ([link 2](#)) and ([link 3](#))
8. **Website blocking:** Reform the website blocking process specifically focussing on removing the opacity existing in regulation. ([link](#))

(Additional context on each of these issues with suggested reforms are present in a tabular manner linked to regular correspondence to the Standing Committee on IT ([link](#)). )

### Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:

- 1. Political Parties:** (i) **Code of conduct:** Formulate a pro-active code of conduct for their online social media volunteers, integrate it within their training sessions with them and also have penalties for online abuse towards expulsion. (ii) **Campaigning :** Commit to fair conduct in the use of digital means in election canvassing and online campaigning. ([link](#)) (iii) **Manifesto:** Should adopt a digital rights section in their manifesto. ([link](#))
- 2. Supreme Court:** (i) **Docket review:** Review the pending cases impacting the constitutional status of Aadhaar given recent notifications and examine ways to expedite their hearings. A similar exercise may be attempted by other Constitutional courts for pending litigations on issues of mass surveillance where there are no pending orders for restraint. This is given the absence of a data protection law or any meaningful surveillance reform.
- 3. Parliament :** (i) **Issue reports and findings:** The Standing Committee on IT has been pro-actively engaging with a broad range of digital rights concerns and it would be beneficial for it to issue findings and recommendations on them to parliament for the benefit of all parliamentarians. Measures to expedite them must be explored. (ii) **Data Protection Committee:** The Data Protection Committee may announce a re-formulated schedule with milestones for completion on the Data Protection Bill. It should also broaden the list of academics, experts and civil society persons who are invited for depositions. A tentative list for which may be published in advance for transparency and feedback.
- 4. Movements and Campaigns** (i) **Identify regions with lack of access:** Given the focus of the Union Government to increase internet access an urgent mapping or reporting must be done by all civil society organisations especially from grass roots and in geographic regions beyond metropolitan centers which highlight lack of high speed internet access due to absence of telecom infrastructure. Follow up correspondence must be sent to the Department of Telecom and in the instance of lack of response may be escalated to the Prime Ministers Office. (ii) **Engage with technology and digital rights:** Technology is becoming flatter and impacting all movements and social sector work. There is an urgent need to engage with it deeply and form clear positions that emerge from rights based frameworks. This requires capacity and culture growth to accommodate and study these shifts. (iii) **Need for the creation of space and platforms for marginalised groups to articulate privacy harms through coalition building :** The concerns of marginalised caste and adivasi groups, women and sexual minorities, informal-gig workers need to be integrated within technology policy. There should be efforts for the active creation of space and leadership development for members of these communities for them to collectively become an integral part of the digital rights ecosystem which is predominantly legalistic, privileged, male and upper caste in India.

5. **Administrative /Oversight Bodies:** (i) Continued halt of biometric authentication (i) Audit of AePS and use of NREGA payment methods instead. (iii) Push to halt health linkage to Aadhaar, and commercialisation of health data (iv) Action related to starvation deaths caused by tech-caused or tech-exacerbated exclusion.



## **DISABILITY RIGHTS**

### **Sourced from National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Disability

#### **Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. Tamil Nadu announced after a struggle an ex-gratia of Rs. 1000/- for disabled who hold valid disability certificates.
2. Kerala provided door step delivery of cooked food for the elderly and disabled (apart from universal coverage of various other things). Disabled students were given Rs. 5000 ex-gratia.
3. Centre announced on March 26 an ex-gratia of Rs. 1,000/- But this benefits only 3.81% of the disabled population (those covered under the NSAP - one has to have 80% disability and BPL) or 7.6% of the working age persons with disabilities. Many states advanced two months pension.
4. The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities on March 27, 2020 issued “Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines” - but in the framing of these guidelines disability rights organisations or their representatives were not involved.

#### **Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

1. Nearly 65% disabled have been out of employment, of which only 1% are from the organised sector. Most of those “employed” are engaged in the unorganised sector or doing odd jobs like vending, begging. The lockdown saw an overwhelming majority of those engaged in the informal sector losing their jobs.
2. The response of the government has been woefully inadequate. Except for the Rs. 1000/- that too limited to just 3.81% of the identified disabled population, the disabled were left to fend for themselves.
3. Even the guidelines brought out by the Central government were not implemented in most of the states.
4. Kerala was the only state which had independently brought out specific guidelines and made them available in accessible formats. The guidelines enabled universal access to benefits
5. Access to health care has been a major issue. Most disabled have underlying health conditions. The lockdown has disrupted routine check-ups and follow ups. For instance, people with blood disorders requiring regular blood transfusions faced innumerable problems. Medicines for treatment of certain conditions continue to be in short supply.
6. CSR funds that were available for NGOs engaged in service delivery have been hit consequent to the launch of the PMCARES.
7. The government floated a proposal to dilute penal provisions contained in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Under the rubric of “decriminalisation” of “minor offences” it sought to compound certain offences etc. But following a campaign the government was forced to withdraw the proposal within a week of seeking responses.
- 8.

## List of Demands:

1. Implement Sec. 24 of the RPD Act, which mandates “support (by the government) during natural or man-made disasters and in areas of conflict”; provision of unemployment allowance; caregiver allowance etc.
2. Accept recommendations by the UN Committee on the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities to amend the Indian Constitution to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability; Amend Sec. 3.3 the RPD Act that legitimises discrimination.
3. Frame a new disability policy in line with the UNCRPD and the RPD Act.
4. Amend the National Trust and RCI Acts; harmonise other legislations in tune with the UNCRPD.
5. Strictly implement provisions of the RPD Act, 2016
6. States that have not frame rules should frame them immediately (Act mandates 6 months from the date of Act coming into force).
7. Appoint Disability Commissioners both at the Centre and the States. Most states do not have commissioners appointed under the Act.
8. Constitute Special Courts at the district level in all states, mandated under the RPD Act.
9. Nominate disabled persons to panchayati raj institutions.
10. Involve disabled persons organisations in all matters concerning them.
11. Speed up certification and UDID issuance process.
12. Enhance pension to Rs. 3000/for those from 40% to 79% disability; for those with 80% and above Rs, 5000/-
13. Disability budgeting across ministries. Minimum 4%.
14. Provide Rs.5000/- per month to all disabled unemployed during the Covid pandemic crisis.
15. All websites to be made accessible
16. All modes of transport, infrastructure and communication to be made accessible to all disabled.
17. Introduce captions for all TV programmes.
18. Amend Sec. 3(3) of the RPD Act to delete “unless it is shown that the impugned act or omission is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim”. (The full section reads: “No person with disability will be discriminated on the ground of disability, unless it is shown that the impugned act or omission is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim”).
19. Amend Article 15(1) and 16(2) of the Constitution to include “disability” as a ground on which discrimination is prohibited.

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD AND MOBILE CRECHES**

**Sourced from Nine is Mine Campaign**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Child Rights, Education

### **Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

Almost all six states have either recommended or mandated that schools should not force parents to make payment for the current academic year or increase fees for the next academic year (2020-21). While certain states like Maharashtra and West Bengal had asked schools to be sympathetic or considerate towards parents while collecting fees for the current and next academic year, other states like Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Karnataka issued mandatory orders regulating fee collection and hikes. The nature of enforcement varies – while the Delhi notification threatened action under the relevant provisions of the Delhi School Education Act, 1973, the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and Disaster Management Act, 2005 (including imprisonment up to 2 years), the Telangana notification stated that non-compliance would result in cancellation of school recognition, and invoking action against the management under the Telangana Education Act, 1982 and revocation of no-objection certificate granted for affiliation to CBSE, ICSE or IGSCE.

### **Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

1. The pause in the implementation of Mid Day Meals has severely undermined the nutritional profile of children of the working class
2. The widespread loss of jobs of parents, has a direct bearing on the investments into children's health and education. Enhanced mental anguish suffered by parents manifests on their children too.
3. Girls have suffered more exclusion from access to education, due to their unequal access to phone and internet as compared to boys
4. There have been reports of an increase in teenage marriages and pregnancies in villages
5. Children are subject to social discrimination, as and when any elder member of the family is diagnosed with COVID

### **List of Demands:**

6% of the total budget should be allocated to Education

### **Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:**

1. Teachers operate out of varied local schools but also government offices including local panchayat offices, post offices and ration shops.
2. That these centres must be provided with online devices and sanitizing materials so that can continue our education in a safe environment.
3. That these new covid centres of learning could also become our local mental health and safety centres.
4. That our Parents and elder siblings could take worksheets home for the younger ones each week to study at home.

5. That rations for mid-day meals be provided to our mothers for all days including Sundays and holidays.
6. That the government sets up formal and regular empowered platforms to consult us and our parents on an ongoing basis.

If we can hold our Children's parliaments and continue to consult with the last child.

If we young citizens of India can model inclusion without the big money available to our leaders  
then why can't our national and state leaders.

## ECONOMY

Sourced from Prof. Jayati Ghosh

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Marco Economy,

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana announced late March
2. Atma Nirbhar Bharat announced late April

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

The Covid-19 pandemic—and even more, the draconian and ill-conceived government response—have unleashed dramatic economic collapse and humanitarian catastrophe in India. The lockdown dealt a massive blow to both demand and supply. The generalised cessation of most economic activity particularly affected informal workers (95% of workforce) who do not have legal or social protection that could provide some income during the period of lockdown. GDP growth had already fallen to 3.1 per cent in January-March 2020, and thereafter the economy has been contracting sharply. Most non-agricultural workers had no livelihood for at least two months, with migrant workers (around 100-150 million) the worst affected. Currently economic activity is being constrained both by the spread of the disease and the continuing effects of demand collapse. The failure to control the pandemic along with extreme economic distress can be explained by ten features of the Indian government's policy response:

- the unthinking adoption of containment strategies not suited to the Indian context;
- excessive centralisation and top-down control, without coordination between central and state governments;
- inadequate investment in and preparation of health systems, facilities and personnel;
- misplaced timing and delayed responses in several critical areas;
- parsimony of the relief measures, despite inflated declarations about the packages, and refusal to use excess public foodgrain stocks to provide free food to those in need;
- inadequate government spending to increase demand to counter the collapse in economic activity;
- misplaced focus on measures to increase liquidity and credit;
- further privatisation of state assets and relaxation of regulations relating to land, labour and environment;
- class, caste and gender biases of the policy responses; and
- suppression of democratic rights and crackdown on dissent during the lockdown.

Macroeconomically speaking, the worst failure has been the inadequate public spending, which is worsening the decline in demand and generating a downward spiral, in addition to depriving people of livelihoods, access to food and essential public services. This is also associated with declining resources to state governments, which are dealing with the bulk of the problems of health and livelihood distress.

This will become a huge problem very soon, because state governments that have tried to deal with the pandemic by frontloading expenditure will soon run out of funds and be bankrupt. Therefore immediate action needs to be taken.

**List of Demands:**

1. Immediately release more food grain stocks to state governments for free distribution for 3 months, to those in need (80% of population to be defined by the states, irrespective of ration card status)
2. Provide Rs 7500 per month for 3 months as compensation for lost incomes during lockdown to 80% of population, defined as above by states.
3. Expand MNREGA to 200 days per household and provide initial assistance to states willing to set up urban employment guarantee schemes.
4. Ensure that farmers are able to sell all their crops at procurement prices or higher.
5. Double public spending on health and transfer to state governments on the basis of the Finance Commission formula.
6. Release all information on money collected under PM-CARES and distribute to state governments for relief purposes.
7. Allow state governments to borrow directly from RBI at repo rate, without conditions, for the rest of the fiscal year.
8. Do not cut other government spending in effort to reduce fiscal deficit—this will only worsen the crisis and lead to large fiscal deficit because of falling tax revenues as GDP falls.
9. Finance the additional spending by borrowing from RBI (deficit financing or monetised deficit).
10. Consider and provide debt restructuring/relief for MSMEs.

## **EDUCATION**

**Sourced from Right to Education Forum**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Education, National Education Policy, Access to Information

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. National Education Policy 2020 ([approved by Cabinet in 2020](#))
2. Guidelines for Digital Education ([Pragyata](#)):
3. Mid-day [Meal](#)
4. Strengthening Teaching Learning and Results for States (STARS) initiative, click [here](#) & [here](#)

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

All 1.5 million schools remain closed in India for nearly 5 months to curb the spread of the covid-19 virus. In such a scenario, the MHRD is pushing for online education to keep children learning during this period, without taking into cognisance the digital divide existing in the country. Several studies indicate that people from marginalised communities do not have access to laptops and/or internet connection and are hence excluded. The pandemic has further enhanced the risks of dropouts, early marriages and child labours. This emphasis on digital learning has given a leeway to the private players to come up with their knowledge products and hence there is a risk of increased commercialisation of education.

In such a context, the STARS initiative doesn't address the systemic inequities in India's education system. There are concerns that this project would route public funds to private pockets without improving the public education system.

The National Education Policy 2020 was approved by the Cabinet without a debate in the parliament on it. The NEP fails to mention the extension of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 for all children from 3-18 years. The policy, in the name from philanthropic schools and PPP, is laying the roadmap for entry of private players in education, which will further commercialise education and the existing inequalities will be exacerbated.

**List of Demands:**

1. Ensure the right to education, health and nutrition of children from migrant families affected because of COVID-19 pandemic
2. Table National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) in Parliament for discussion
3. Complete Implementation of RTE Act 2009
4. Extension of RTE Act 2009 from 3-18 years to universalise of school education
5. Declare timeline for allocation of 6% GDP to education
6. Stop exclusion through online instruction and explore alternative means
7. Take steps to stop commercialisation and regulate non state actors in education
8. Address specific barriers to education faced by Dalit, Adivasi, minority children, children with disabilities, girls and other vulnerable groups
9. End rationalisation/merger of schools
10. Ensure disinfection of schools and ensure availability of adequate WASH facilities before their re-opening.
11. Ensure all teachers' vacancies are filled with immediate effect and pending salaries and allowances should be paid with immediate effect.

## **ELDERLY**

**Sourced from Pension Parishad and Helpage India**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Elderly Policies, Pension, Ration, Health

### **Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. Pension
  - Initial release of 2 to 3 months lump sum in April'20 under IGNOAPS / state pension's schemes.
  - Ex-Gratia amount of Rs. 1000/- to all BPL includes elders.
  - Rs. 500/- under to Jan Dhan accounts for 3 months.
2. Health
  - PM Ayushman Yojna – providing free COVID testing & treatment in empanelled hospitals for beneficiaries.
  - Elderly advisories issued related to Covid 19
3. Food
  - Distribution of rations via PDS or PMGKA Yojana

### **Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

#### **1. Pensions:**

- The OAP amounts in most states is less and surviving the pandemic with the little amount is too difficult especially when livelihoods lost during lockdown
- Coverage of OAP under IGNOAPS is limited i.e. only approx. 3.83 lakhs of the approx. 11 lakhs elder population nationwide. Large numbers of needy elders not covered under scheme.
- Ex-Gratia of Rs. 1000/- to BPL (includes BPL elders)
- Only 7 states have released Ex-Gratia amount of Rs. 1000/-.
- Rs. 500/- to Jan Dhan a/c for 3 months
- Only 9 states released the Rs. 500/- p.m. for either March or for March & April or 3 months i.e. March-April-May'20.

#### **2. Health:**

- Inadequate COVID related facilities for e.g. hospitals, beds, Oxygen Cylinders, Ventilators, PPE Kits, Masks, Gloves, Sanitizers in most states in the initial months and continues to be so in many states and state-run hospitals.
- Private Hospitals charging very high for COVID treatment.
- Failure of health insurance schemes for poor including poor elders like PM-JAY (Ayushman Bharat Scheme) to provide adequate coverage to poor elders.
- Cases of misdemeanour by health personnel
- Neglect by health system for e.g. hospitals (pvt/govt) of providing treatments for other diseases patients due to priority given to COVID. In many hospitals in the initial months General OPDs were closed and elderly faced issues like- routine check-up visits to doctors and regular treatments/medicines of other chronic diseases like BP, Diabetes etc.



**3. Food:**

- PDS food distribution scheme performance overall was not as per requirements during the COVID pandemic period in many states though in few states as per reports for e.g. Kerala & Bihar PDS performance was good. In Delhi as per reports by NGOs and media only 30% to 40% of PDS were distributing food via PDS Ration Shops properly.
- Lack of coverage of elders in other schemes for e.g. PMGKAY scheme under NFSA was mainly for weaker sections registered beneficiaries, thus good nos. of elderly not covered.

**List of Demands:****1. Pensions**

- Universalize Pensions Coverage to all needy & poor elders.
- Increase Amount and Coverage to cover all needy & poor elders.
- Pension should be indexed to inflation or should be half of minimum wage.
- Timely distribution every month for pensions to elders a/cs.
- Both Central and State govts. should increase budget support for pensions.

**2. Health:**

- Increase the Geriatric Facilities for elderly in every district hospital across the country as per MWPS Act.
- Geriatric OPDs should run with SOP related to Covid.
- Free COVID tests and treatment for senior citizens
- A universal insurance of at least Rs. 5 lacs for all elderly.
- Make Health a Universal Right for all citizens.

**3. Food:**

- Inclusion of elderly in beneficiaries list under PMGKAY.
- Universalize and Make Food a Right

## ENVIRONMENT

Sourced from Kalpavriksh and Let India Breathe on behalf of Vikalp Sangam Core Group

Sector/Issue, Tags: Environment

Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:

1. Coal auctions for 41 new coal blocks were announced in ecologically fragile, biodiverse areas home to tribal and other vulnerable communities. This is across areas in 5 states (Odisha, MP, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh).
2. There continue to be unmitigated [Push for single window clearances](#).
3. [Reading down of the EIA notification through Draft Amendments](#) announced during the health emergency. Prior consultations to arrive at the text of the amendments were only with project proponents, SEIAAs and SPCBs. No consultations took place with gram sabhas, panchayats, urban ward sabhas, or others likely to be directly impacted.
4. State Government initiated reforms related to land and [labour laws](#) during a pandemic. E.g . [Deletion of 79A and 79B of Karnataka Land Reforms Act](#)
5. [Deemed two year environment](#) clearances for mining projects whose leases were transferred to fresh bidders on 31.3.2020, was announced by Government of India
6. New green highway projects announced followed by MoRTH letter to state governments seeking faster approvals for highway projects ([here](#) and [here](#))
7. Virtual environmental appraisals, approvals and online public hearings are taking place through the pandemic
8. Announcement for on ground public hearings for projects with social distancing, restricted participation in matters of extreme significance such as lives and livelihoods ([here](#) and [here](#))
9. Government orders for construction (including demolition activity, tree felling) of contentious projects, including [Mumbai Coastal Road](#), Redevelopment colonies in Delhi, [Aarey](#) during lockdown despite not being essential
10. Mining and other industrial activities were permitted as essential projects from the first week of the lockdown ([here](#) and [here](#)).
11. [Diversion of CAFE, DMF funds for Covid relief](#)
12. Lack of minimum support price for forest produce
13. Announcement of [Draft Fisheries Policy asking for comments during lockdown](#) (and [here](#)).
14. [Lack of clarity](#) on the disbursement and use of NCAP funds to combat air pollution (and [here](#))

(for further references see **Annexure 1**)

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

1. **Industrial accidents and project disasters:** fly ash dam breaches e.g. Singrauli, boats carrying coal ash sinking in Hoogly ([here](#)), Vishakapatnam gas leak ([here](#), [here and here](#)), Neyveli TPP boiler blasts, Baghjan oil well disaster ([here and here](#)). This is all during the lockdown period there was **no monitoring or supervision of projects**.
2. Significant impact of the lockdown on marginalised sections, including, adivasis and other forest-dwelling communities ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

3. **Reported evictions of forest dwellers** ([here](#) and [here](#)), amongst [many others](#), during “stay at home” and “work from home” orders for citizens. This is against the MHA guidelines.
4. **Lack of possibility of on ground protests or mobilization**, public hearings, and other such ways affected people can voice their opinions. Lack of media attention to environmental issues, due to COVID related news overpowering everything else.
5. **Significant amount of greenwashing**, attempting to show how responsive the government is to environmental issues, e.g. projecting India as a climate leader in global circles, while actually clearing huge areas of forest and giving further impetus to coal mining, and saying virtually nothing meaningful regarding climate mitigation and adaptation within India.

### List of Demands:

#### 1. Immediate steps:

- **Withdraw regressive decisions or proposals mentioned above:** The EIA notification, auctioning of coal blocks, sidestepping or fast-tracking of clearances.
- **Issue a moratorium on diversion of natural ecosystems for infrastructure, mining, and commercial purposes:** A clear scientific [link](#) between ecological destruction and the spread of diseases like COVID-19 has been established. Even if COVID-19 originated in China, other such pathogens could originate in India, or spread widely, due to the disruption of natural balances and inter-dependencies. An immediate moratorium on the diversion of natural ecosystems projects is crucial; and instead to initiate alternatives for meeting livelihood and development needs. Expanding coal mining in the name of ‘self-reliance’ is in violation of what the current crisis has taught us.
- **Adivasis/tribal and other forest dwelling communities:** For an active environmentally sensitive COVID response & apart from immediate health and relief measures, MoTA with TRIFED and relevant state departments should (a) urgently devise effective institutional mechanisms for the collection, storage, procurement and sale of non timber forest produce during the ongoing collection season, and provide necessary financial and logistical support to Gram Sabhas and forest management committees constituted under FRA together with other PPAs for direct procurement, ensuring fair prices, from the gatherers; (b) investigate and take action on cases of forest rights violation and eviction due to mining and forest diversions, plantations by forest dept, restrictions on access to forest for livelihoods activities; (c) request MoEF to release the huge compensatory afforestation fund to the Gram Sabhas constituted under FRA to support community forest management for generating livelihoods and wage employment for tribals and forest dwellers to deal with the economic crisis; and (d) ensure all of the above with appropriate cultural sensitivity in the case of PVTGs, nomadic pastoral communities, and other vulnerable sections.

#### 2. Medium and long-term steps:

- **Generate sustainable livelihoods and infrastructure:** COVID crisis presents a crucial opportunity to redesign our economy towards generating tens of millions of ecologically sustainable and dignified livelihoods. Significant public expenditure should be put into such livelihoods and into ecologically sensitive infrastructure. This includes: small-farmer based organic agriculture (shifting current fertilizer subsidy completely into this over 5 years), assistance to pastoralists, fishers and forest-dwellers, decentralized renewable energy and water harvesting, dispersed production of goods and services with a strong biomass and handmade base, integrated health services maximising nature-based healing and preventive care, and a massive livelihood programme based on regenerating the country's badly degraded soils and water systems. (For more details, pl. see '[People's Manifesto for a Just, Equitable and Sustainable India](#)', brought out by constituents of the Vikalp Sangam process).
- **Promote ecological design and sensitivity in all development and livelihoods:** Environmental sustainability must be brought to the centre of all planning, budgeting, and programmes related to development. This necessitates moving away from piecemeal EIA kind of approaches to more sectoral assessments of risk and impacts, the core involvement of communities and people likely to be impacted in the assessments, independent assessments and monitoring. A clear policy and programmatic direction is needed for ecologically sustainable and equitable ways of generating livelihoods and jobs, infrastructure, communications, etc. There are hundreds of examples of people meeting their basic needs and securing dignified livelihoods, through such ways, which can be learnt from (see for instance [Vikalp Sangam](#)). Orienting existing schemes like MNREGS, housing, agriculture, and others towards this is eminently possible.
- **Strengthen self-governance through gram sabhas, area/ward sabhas:** Institutions of self-governance must be legally empowered to be part of all decisions affecting their ecological and environmental security, through community rights (including through the Forest Rights Act), and through prior informed consent being made mandatory. Gram sabhas, area/ward sabhas, and other local governance institutions will need help to build capacity and generate resources, so that they can govern their lands and ecosystems, their economic and community lives in way that ensures representation and participation of marginalised sections to ensure social justice.
- **Strengthen local, self-reliant economies:** It is evident in the COVID crisis that a global economy is an extremely vulnerable system that is prone to collapse. Institutions of local self-governance must be provided with the resources, technical assistance and other forms of cooperation in order to grow their own local, self-reliant economies, using local and new skills and resources, catering first and foremost to local needs. Through this, the necessity of mass mobility and trade could be reduced significantly and help reduce and reverse rural-urban migration caused by economic and social distress which leads to very high urban densities that are ripe for epidemics.
- **Redesign urban and semi-urban settlements:** Redesign urban and semi-urban settlements in a manner that workplace and residence for most people are close by, self-governance through area sabhas is empowered, and urban natural ecosystems are regenerated and protected through citizens' forums. The current environmental injustice that cities impose on rural areas should be transformed through programmes of urban self-reliance and sustainability, with 'smart city' approach being replaced by 'wise, equitable city'.
- **Restore, regenerate, conserve natural ecosystems:** Natural ecosystems (forests, wetlands, grasslands, coastal/marine areas) should be restored, regenerated and conserved in at least a

third of India (in both rural and urban areas), with local communities empowered to govern them.

- **Eliminate pollution:** Urgent steps should be taken to reduce, eliminate, and replace sources of pollution, such that over a 10 to 15 year period, the quality of air, water and soil is brought to levels safe for human and other animal use; this includes substantially replacing private with public transport and harmful chemicals with safe substances, eliminating sources of noise, and treating all wastewater before discharging into waterbodies.
- **Tackle the climate crisis:** India's national climate action plan should be reviewed and revised, ensuring widespread participation of communities likely to be most affected, civil society organisations, and independent experts, with a view to making it more robust and impactful through substantial upward revision of goals for mitigation and adaptation, specific target for emission peaking, significantly reducing elite demand for power, and prioritised actions to help climate refugees.

### Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:

#### 1. For Official Bodies:

- **Set up a National Environment Commission:** A National Environment Commission should be established, with a Constitutional status akin to the CEC and CAG, with the mandate of monitoring adherence of relevant norms and laws by government agencies and corporations, and providing a redressal and interface mechanism for the public.
- **Recognise the rights of nature:** The rights of nature should be incorporated into the Constitution and in relevant laws, with relevant sections of the public, especially local communities, empowered to be its custodians. Judgements of the Uttarakhand High Court on rights of Ganga and Yamuna, and of animals, can be used as a base, but with elaboration of what such rights would mean, and clear guidelines on how this would involve respect to all cultures (without imposition of any one faith on others, or targeting of particular communities or cultures), not affect fundamental livelihoods and food security of communities directly dependent on nature and natural resources.

#### 2. For Parties/Movements/Civil society:

- **Facilitate local self-governance and self-reliance:** Civil society and people's movements should enable and facilitate communities to move towards swaraj / self-governance and localized economic self-reliance, as given above; and to resist imposition of destructive projects and processes on them; in all this to also facilitate struggles to remove traditional and new inequities (gender, caste, class, etc).
- **MPs, MLAs, other politically elected representatives** at rural and urban level should spend more time on the ground understanding the issues faced by people and the environment (including wildlife), dialoguing and discussing with them, and taking their issues into the forums they are members of.

## **FISH WORKERS**

**Sourced from National Fish Workers Forum, Focus on the Global South and Delhi Forum**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Fish Workers, Labour, Fisheries

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

- 1. Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana**
- 2. Draft Fisheries Policy 2020:** The policy is export-oriented, production-driven, and based on capital investments, which will strip small scale fishers off their rights of access to commons, and also damage the environment in the long run. In addition, the policy does not talk about women. It is silent on caste and class.

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

As per the report prepared by the ICAR- Central Institute of Fisheries Technology, Kochi on the 26th of April, 2020 it has been estimated that pandemic and the lockdown have resulted in large scale disruptions in the value chain of marine capture fisheries in India. The losses have been estimated to be about INR 224 crores/day for fishing sector.

Fishworkers across the economic spectrum – from the large scale mechanised fleets to the small scale fishers across the coastline have suffered an economic blow due to the lockdown. Keeping in mind that marine capture fisheries is already a stressed sector, the loss of fish has created a dent in the economy and food security for a number of people. The share of the fisheries sector in India's Gross Domestic Product is about 1.03 % as of 2017-'18 contributing Rs 1.75 trillion during 2017-'18, accounting for about 6.58% share of India's agricultural GDP. According to the government's own estimates, the sector provides livelihoods to about 16 million fishers and fish farmers at the primary level and almost twice the number along the value chain.

Small-scale fisheries, are finding it hard to continue fishing means that they are not able to land fish and have any income, is a part of the problem which further manifests to loss of income, and the other is the lack of food and diet on a daily basis.”

Women too, especially single women, who comprise about 75 percent of those engaged in fish marketing in the marine fish sector [at markets, by the roadside, by head loading for door-to-door sale], are also among the hardest hit by the loss of access to fish, to transport systems, to markets, and to the consumers. Even before the Covid19 pandemic, it was difficult to get elderly and young women fish workers to be registered with societies and cooperatives. Most women fish workers are still not registered with any society and therefore they cannot access government relief. This lack of data, increases the existing marginalisation.

Many of the migrant fishworkers who are stranded are living in dire straits and returned home with great difficulty where they had to live in the harbour under unliveable conditions and are contract labourers too who no longer have a job.

Reopened fisheries also faced disrupted commodity chains, a significant lack of consumer demand, and a rising fear of being infected by COVID-19.

#### **List of Demands:**

1. There should be an economic package announced for the fishing community keeping in mind that the monsoon ban season is arriving and will also affect the livelihoods of crores of fishworkers and the ones who are dependent on the occupation.
2. The Draft Fisheries Policy 2020 should be immediately withdrawn and consultations should be resumed with the stakeholders. The policy should be translated in all the vernacular languages before any sort of consultations.
3. The Pradhan Manthri Matsya Sampada Yojana Scheme should be relooked into keeping in mind the Standing Committee's recommendations.
4. National Fishworkers Forum demands that a monthly allowance of INR 15,000/- up to three months be provided in advance; This should be actually given to the fishworkers and those engaged in allied activities.
5. Develop a relief package for the sector in consultation with fish worker organisations and individuals in the following three stages:
  - (i) Short- term with a horizon period of 3 weeks until the end of the lockdown period, where there should be loan payment deferrals to a period of six months keeping in mind the ban period during the monsoon period too in the eastern and western coast.
  - (ii) Mid- term with a horizon period encompassing the ban period April 15th - 14th June, 2020 on the East coast and from 1st June to 31st July, 2020 on the West coast.
  - (iii) Long- term with a horizon period until the end of the next financial year on the 31st of March, 2021 by revisiting the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Agriculture in the budget session.

## **FOOD AND NUTRITION**

### **Sourced from Right to Food Campaign**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Food Security, Nutrition

#### **Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. Atma Nirbhar Bharat
2. PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana
3. PM Jan Dhan Cash transfer
4. Extension of Ujjwala Yojana
5. One Nation One Ration
6. Various state programmes, see here: <http://www.righttofoodcampaign.in/home/covid-19>

#### **Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

Even before the pandemic, India had one of the largest undernourished populations in the world. After the abrupt lockdown the situation of malnutrition and starvation has been acutely exacerbated. Millions of migrants were stranded not only due to halt of all public transportation but also lack of governmental food packages. Most of the various announcements of the government during the lockdown have effectively only catered to those with National Food Security Act ration cards.

As per the NFSA on an average 67% of the population were to receive these cards in 2013. But currently, only 60% of the population has these NFSA ration card based on Census 2011. The government has not accounted for the population increase in the last decade. Further, exclusion errors are rampant in targeting in welfare schemes. Insistence on aadhaar has increased exclusions.

Numerous surveys have evaluated the efficacy of government schemes. Some states are doing better than the Centre. Various states like, Kerala, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Odisha, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and some others have announced relief packages to ensure that socially and economically backward classes are not left to fend for themselves. For example, In Chhattisgarh, the state government has decided to provide 1 kg grams per ration card and 5 kg rice per person to all ration cardholders (except APL cardholders) under Chhattisgarh Food Security Act (non NFSA) for free till November 2020.

#### **List of Demands:**

##### **1. Public Distribution System:**

- Universalisation of PDS: In order to avoid exclusion errors, PDS benefits must be made universal for all residents without making Aadhaar/UID mandatory.



- Double the Antyodaya Coverage: The coverage of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana must be doubled to cover all vulnerable groups such as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), old people and single women.
- Grains, Pulses and Edible Oils: 10kg of grains, 1.5 kg pulses/dal and 800gms of cooking oil must be provided per person per month, through the PDS, at subsidised prices
- Provide compensatory food security allowance for at least 100 million families who have been excluded from the NFSA since 2013, despite population growth
- Provide compensation for all families with starvation deaths
- Extend the distribution of free grains and dal under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana beyond November 2020.

## **2. Migrants:**

- Expand to a universal PDS in a manner where workers can access the PDS entitlements from their current location of residence, irrespective of whether they have documents such as ration cards, residence proof etc.
- Expand Atma Nirbhar Bharat entitlement for 6 months

## **3. Community Kitchens/Feeding Centres**

- In urban areas: Canteens serving subsidised and nutritious meals must be set up in all cities and towns, akin to the Amma canteens in Tamil Nadu
- In rural areas, open up school mid day meals or anganwadi centres for provision of food to destitute, aged, single women and disabled.

## **4. Children:**

- Provide home delivery or spot feeding of a comprehensive nutrition package with cereals, pulses, oil and eggs for children under fourteen years, pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls till schools and anganwadis re-open
- Eggs, milk and fruits must be provided in all schools and anganwadis. For children who do not eat eggs additional provision of fruits or milk can be made.
- The National Creche Scheme must be strengthened and expanded. Twenty-five percent of anganwadi centres must be converted to anganwadi-cum-crèches. All MGNREGA worksites must have provision of child care services in accordance with the Act.
- The mid-day meal scheme should be extended to all children up to class XII.
- Implement the full range of ICDS services and child care including growth monitoring, referral services, nutrition and health counselling.

## **5. Women:**

- Maternity Entitlements under NFSA: Maternity entitlements under NFSA must be provided to all pregnant and lactating women, without any conditionalities. All the backlog of maternity entitlements must be cleared immediately and for the next six months, the maternity benefit under PMMVY should be given in advance in one instalment. The amount of benefit should be increased and regularly updated according to inflation. Further, legislative provisions need to be made to ensure universal and wage-linked maternity benefits to all women.
- Community Meals: take-home rations or Free, hot and cooked nutritious midday meals with eggs and fruits must be provided for pregnant women and lactating mothers in anganwadi centres.

- Expand Ujjwala cooking gas fuel benefit to all priority and antyodaya households
- Ensure urgent decentralised monitoring frameworks, grievance redressal mechanisms and penalties for non-implementation of all entitlements

**6. Cyclone and Floods:** A number of regions in the country, especially in Eastern India, are affected by a double burden of COVID and cyclones/floods. These areas need special attention to ensure all of the above. Provision of cooked food in these areas must be set up immediately, along with a special package of rations that includes cereals, pulses, oil, eggs, milk, fruits and vegetables.

## HEALTH

Sourced from Jan Swasthya Abhiyan

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Health

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. In April, Centre announced Rs. 15,000 crore as Covid-19 emergency response and health system preparedness package, which is less than 0.1% of country's GDP. Out of Rs. 15,000 crore, Centre is to release Rs. 7,774 crore for immediate use and Rs. 7,226 crore for medium term support till 2024. The Rs. 15,000 crore package is out of the loan grant India has received USD 1 billion funds for Covid-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness from World Bank, the conditionalities under which promote the agenda of vigorous privatisation of the health sector.
2. Under the "Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package: Insurance Scheme for Health Workers fighting COVID-19", an insurance cover of Rs. 50 lakh is being provided for a period of 90 days to Health Workers. However, this accident insurance scheme covers only cases where the worker loses her life. It does not provide any support to health workers if they get infected by COVID-19 and need treatment, care and support. Further, private sector workers are included in the scheme only if they are drafted for COVID-19 responsibilities. Moreover, the figure of 22 lakh health workers is a gross underestimation of the actual size of the workforce

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

The response of the Union and most State governments has remained inadequate at a time of a national health emergency. There has been no planning or scientific basis for the lockdown and un-lockdown strategy. Moreover, too little has been done too late in regulating the private sector or commissioning their services to tackle the pandemic crisis. The crisis has been heightened further due to the lack of transparency in governments' approach; data has been kept away from public scrutiny. There has also been inadequate testing and a grossly inadequate provision of PPE kits.

During this time, the private sector has completely failed to respond to the COVID crisis. There was a vociferous demand by the private sector for maintaining high rates of testing (Rs. 4500), whereas the actual cost of testing when done in public facilities is much lower. There have been a number of cases of denial of care after which some state governments entered into agreement with private sector hospitals and also requisitioned their services. Reports of gross overcharging by the private sector abound. After intervention by the health rights groups and other civil society, some State governments have fixed the rates of treatment for Covi19 in the private sector. However, the private sector continues to flout the government orders and cases of overcharging are still rampant. PMJAY insurance based scheme has largely failed to provide care to needy patients during the COVID epidemic.

- Non-covid patients suffering from such diseases as Cancer, Hepatitis C, HIV AIDS, TB, patients needing regular dialysis etc. have been denied treatment at hospitals due to over-emphasis on Covid-19. Adequate alternative arrangements have not been made for ensuring that regular health services and medicines are available. Many lives have been lost owing to this.

- Maternal and child health services have been severely hit. The immunisation services, distribution iron and folic acid tablets and other services have hampered.
- Pregnant women have had to face severe difficulties in accessing delivery services. Those coming from containment zones have had to suffer more as they were denied admission and treatment.
- Private healthcare sector has been charging exorbitantly for Covid-19 related admissions and testing, as well as for care of non-Covid conditions, along with violations of Patients rights.
- Health workers, especially frontline healthcare workers such as ASHAs and Aanganwadi workers, are working under adverse circumstances. They are overworked and in some cases not even being paid their regular wages in full and in time. There have been protests by ASHA workers in various States demanding minimum wages. Even now they do not have adequate personal protective equipment.
- The sanitation and MTS workers are not being paid their due wages and many of the unions have had to resort to legal measures to ensure the due payment.
- There have been sudden lay-offs of many Home Based Care workers
- The vulnerable and the marginalised communities, such as the religious minorities, Dalits, sex workers, LGBTQI, are facing increased violations and denials

**List of Demands:**

1. Increase public spending on health to 5% of GDP in the long run and to at least 3% of GDP by 2024.
2. Channelize allocation towards strengthening public system in a sustainable manner rather than directing funds to purchase care from the ill-equipped private sector
3. Abandon PMJAY
4. Strengthen preventive and public health services, primary health care in both rural and urban areas; increase allocation for Health & Wellness Centres
5. Guarantee access to free essential and lifesaving medicines and diagnostics for all through public health facilities
6. Investment in pharma and medical equipment manufacturing industries led by PSUs
7. Establish centralised and transparent procurement, and decentralised distribution to ensure regular availability of good quality generic medicines in public facilities
8. Use compulsory licensing to promote manufacturing ARTs
9. Creating adequate numbers of permanent posts. All levels of public health system staff be provided with adequate and continued skill training, fair wages, social security and decent working conditions
10. Strengthen IDSP and other disease surveillance system
11. Increase public investment on health research
12. Expanding and strengthening the Clinical Establishment Act of 2010 along with ensuring its effective, generalised implementation immediately; Establishing regulation of rates as a central feature of this Act
13. Universal implementation of Patient Rights Charter, making it legally mandatory, and establishing an empowered Patient Grievance Redressal mechanism
14. Formation of a well-staffed public regulatory network functioning at national, state and district levels

15. Public harnessing of the private healthcare sector, bringing under public direction at least 80% of beds in all private hospitals above minimum size. This publicly funded measure would replace the problematic PMJAY scheme.
16. Formation of multi-stakeholder health councils at district, city and state levels
17. All health care and allied workers both permanent and contractual involved in COVID 19 duty should be compensated Rs. 50 lakh if the worker dies and on getting infected they should be given equal treatment facilities without any discrimination
18. All contractual workers (including safai karamcharis) should be given special incentive/additional wages for their COVID 19 related work
19. Regularise all health scheme workers as employees
20. All the employees working in COVID 19 ward should be provided with adequate PPE, regular health check-ups and COVID 19 test; long duty hours need to be reduced
21. Expand the Employees' State Insurance Scheme (ESIS) to include entire working population in the unorganised sector
22. Ensure sexual reproductive health services without disruption including access to contraception, safe abortion and maternal health services at all levels from the village to the district hospital
23. Provide sex workers with sexual reproductive health (including maternity and safe abortion) information and counselling for mental health issues in one place
24. There has been a massive loss in trust in the public health system especially among the Schedule Castes and Minorities. Provided counselling support to minorities and scheduled caste and tribes during admission and their stay in the hospital. Take proactive steps to dispel myths in the community through messaging by frontline workers and partnering with NGOs.
25. Urgent action is required to improve the socio-economic conditions of Muslims, especially the most marginalised among them. All basic rights of citizenship - access to health care, education, safe and clean water sanitation, housing - must be provided in a way that is non-discriminatory, sensitive and context-specific
26. All healthcare facilities must follow provisions of RPD Act 2016 and ensure persons with disabilities can access these facilities without any barrier
27. Establish strong decentralised and participatory planning processes through effective Panchayati Raj institutions with strong involvement of communities
28. Develop community-based health and social development plan through collective and participatory approach
29. Establish effective Grievance Redressal Mechanism
30. Ensure social accountability and transparency in the system

#### **Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:**

1. Parliament needs to be convened at earliest to discuss a wide range of issues related to the management of and other aspects related to Covid-19 pandemic. At least the Standing Committee on Health should meet and assess the situation, both in terms of ground situation and the policy pronouncements, and advise the government.
2. Bodies such as NHRC and Supreme Court need to keep a close watch on the developing situation and take suo-motu cognisance of health rights violations and denials. NHRC and

Supreme Court must issue regular advisories to governments, both Centre and States, to prevent violations as well as direct them to act in the interests of the people, especially the vulnerable and the marginalised.

3. CAG needs to take independent review and assessment of the fund allocation announced for COVID-19 management, as also of such fund collections as under PM Care and audit the expenditure under these.
4. Political parties and their representatives need to raise demands for pro-people policies to be adopted by the government, both within parliament and assemblies, as well as through broader movements, thus keeping governments in check.
5. Civil society movements/groups/networks/individuals need to come together and forge alliances and give voice to people's demands and ensure that the vulnerable and the marginalised are not discriminated against in treatment and provision of health services, that they are not exploited at the hands of the private sector, raise voice against the exploitation of health workers across different categories, and fight for the rights of patients and health workers while demanding publicly organised systems for Universal Health Care.

## **JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **Sourced from Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Law, Judicial Accountability, Access to Justice

#### **Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

Even before the lockdown was announced on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, the Supreme Court had suspended its regular functioning and as a result many urgent matters such as habeas corpus petitions in the Kashmir context, petitions challenging the constitutionality of Citizenship Amendment Act, petitions challenging the abrogation of Article 370, bail petitions, electoral bonds matters, were not being heard. The suspension of regular physical hearing has adversely affected the citizen's right to access justice..

The pandemic and the announcement of the lockdown without any preparation threw millions of people out of jobs and created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The judiciary especially the higher judiciary was seen as abdicating its responsibility and oath to protect fundamental rights of citizens during this lockdown and to hold the executive accountable for violating these rights. This abdication is seen in the manner the courts have dealt with cases relating to the migrant crisis. The court dismissed petitions which sought ensuring safe transport and financial security for migrants. Statements made by SG such as there are no migrants walking on the roads were accepted at face value without asking for any evidence, even when it was clear that people were facing an unprecedented crisis. Finally the SC took up the issue suo moto after wide-spread criticism, though it was too little, too late.

#### **List of Demands:**

1. Immediately resume the physical functioning of courts.
2. Prioritize the hearing of habeas corpus petitions as it involves the right to life and liberty.
3. Enact a detailed and actionable strategic plan for filling up of vacancies in the lower courts and the high courts
4. Implement the Gram Nyayalaya Act
5. Make appropriate parliamentary and budgetary allocations for the implementation, growth and success of the Gram Nyaylayas Act.
6. SC to appoint in house committees to investigate serious charges with documentary evidence made against Judges and the elevation of such judges without even a proper investigation into those charges.
7. Put in place a full time and independent judicial appointments commission and a judicial complaints authority to examine complaints against judges and to take action.
8. Decentralise the power to allocate cases and dismantle the continuing sole authority of the Chief Justice which has led to its abuse by successive Chief Justices.
9. Create grassroot-level support and demand for setting up requisite gram nyaylayas at the sub tehsil level in the country.

## LABOUR

Sourced from Working Peoples Charter, NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, Peoples Action for Employment Guarantee and Stranded Workers Action Network

Sector/Issue, Tags: Labour, Employment

Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:

1. **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)** : The [first financial package](#) announced did not have measures to support the migrant workers during the nation-wide lockdown.
2. **Labour Reforms**: Several states have [notified relaxation](#) in labour laws citing industrial growth. These states are Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan, amongst others.
3. **State Government Reforms**: Uttar Pradesh has appointed a Commission for Employment and Planning for the workforce. Madhya Pradesh has created a special commission for migrant workers. Himachal Pradesh and Odisha have started urban employment schemes. Various states governments have given employment income from the State Welfare BOCW boards.
4. **Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**: As a part of this, the Finance Minister had announced various [measures](#) including setting up of Labour Codes for Universalization of right of minimum wages, free food grain supply to migrant workers for a period of two months and the announcement of One Nation, One Ration Card among others.
5. **Migration Crisis**: The Supreme Court in May took [suo moto](#) cognizance of the migrant crisis and directed the Central and the State governments to facilitate their travel to their respective states, as well as to take further steps to formulate employment schemes and skill-mapping exercises for migrant workers.

Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:

1. Anti-labour law reform 'labour codes' are being pushed as never before. One code 'wage code' has already become statute but yet to be implemented, and the remaining are under consideration with parliament standing committees. These codes are meant to substantially remove basic statutory protection
2. States pushes labour ordinances- to increase working hours, non-compliance of labour laws etc. Centre has made increasing 'ease of doing business' as one of the conditions for states to be able to access additional funds during a time when there is a lot of pressure on state finances.
3. Lack of registration has prevented informal workers from getting to access COVID led government scheme benefits and other social security entitlements.
4. At present, more than 14 crore individuals are jobless, if we include the daily wagers/contract/casual, there are more than 24 crores who are out of livelihood at present.
5. The MSMEs sector have reported that 30% to 35% units may not be in position to start their activity



6. 100% FDI in PSUs like railway, defence, port & dock, coal, Air India, banks and insurance including space science and atomic energy
7. DA freeze and wages withheld/wage cut across sector
8. City transport sector such as auto rickshaw, tempo and other forms of traditional mode of transport have been worst affected. The issue of micro loan and NBFS led credit to such workers have
9. Health care and other public services workers including private nurses situation got deteriorated despite their unprecedented contribution. Many workers were laid off at private healthcare services, wage cut and increased working hours without any precautionary measures.
10. Street economy: The livelihood of street vendors has been severely impacted
11. There has been increased privatisation in the coal sector and there have also been debates of FDI in mining sector.

#### **List of Demands:**

1. The relaxation in labour statutes are against the principles and ethos of the Constitution and Supreme Court order over the years which were further strengthening the labour laws. Since the labour laws do not cover a large section of the workforce, especially the informal workers, we are of the opinion that the change and reform must be done immediately and in a manner that ensures that all workers get their just entitlements. On urgent basis the registration of workers must be done under the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008, BOCW Act or any other state laws on access of welfare entitlements.
2. The government must urgently allocate subsidies for the MSME sector, in which the wage subsidy is a major component. Further, MSMEs should get priority from the government whenever it creates any support for the industry in the form of economic infrastructure.
3. The government must not disinvest in any public sector enterprises, such as railways, airlines, mining, etc. These are national properties and therefore they belong to the people of India and must not be put under private control. Apart from other important reasons, this is also being demanded to ensure the welfare of the employees working in these industries.
4. The government must uphold the principle for equal pay for equal work. Any permanent work being done in any industry must not be done by contract workers. All permanent jobs must be done only by regular employees and therefore the fixed term employment ordinance must be scrapped immediately. For example, all public sector enterprises such as banks (especially Bank Mitras), municipalities, hospitals, etc.
5. The government must pay DA as per regular practice and pay all wages on time. This is imperative to even spur demand and get the economy going again. Further the government must do the auditing of all industries and support such industries, including wages, social security, etc, with subsidies so that they will be in a position to pay employees on time.
6. In addition to credit support, income support in the form of a one-time livelihood support not less than Rs. 10,000 must also be provided to city transport sector workers such as auto rickshaw, tempo, including app-based 'gig-workers', etc. Further, the installments of loans from microcredit agencies and NBFC must also be deferred and interest must not be charged

for this interim period. In addition, all app-based ‘gig-workers’ must also get covered under labour law regulations and the government must bring in appropriate policy to enable this.

7. All workers in the healthcare sector, like nurses and ASHA workers, have been at the forefront of fighting Covid-19. All such workers must be regularised to at par with at least D-grade employees of the government. All nurses in the private sector must also receive the same employee benefits as their public sector counterparts.
8. All street vendors must be identified, recognised and registered as street vendors. The local government bodies must also actively increase awareness about Covid-19 to counter the communalisation of the pandemic and issue special orders to ensure that there is no discrimination on the basis of religion and caste.

### **Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:**

1. Local authorities must put in extra efforts to put in governance mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of existing welfare schemes or any directives issues by higher authorities under the NDMA, Epidemic Act, etc.
2. The government must not use the ordinance route and must pass all laws through the legislature in a democratic manner.
3. The Indian Labour Conference (ILC) must be held urgently to collectively deliberate on labour policies. Workers organisations are ready to understand / have dialogue with the industrial fraternity and concerned government authorities in the spirit of tripartitism and social dialogue to fix the complex question of the economy. It is pertinent to mention that India being a founding member of ILO cannot undermine the very principles of globally agreed decent work agenda.
4. Appeal to citizens to not discriminate with street vendors or anyone else on the basis on race, gender, caste or religion.

## **MGNREGA**

### **Sourced from NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, Peoples Action for Employment Guarantee and from APU's brief on MGNREGA**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Employment Guarantee, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), Livelihood Security

#### **Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. The central government announced an additional allocation of Rs 40,000 crores for NREGA in 2020-21 to meet an increase in the demand for employment.
2. Government of Odisha increased wage rate by Rs.91 in Keonjhar district from the state budget
3. The Government of Odisha has come up with a plan to provide 200 days of entitlement for employment in MGNREGA to every job card holding families in 20 of the most vulnerable blocks from four districts. The state has committed to set aside Rs. 500 Crores or the additional 100 days

#### **Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

1. 48 percent of the Total NREGA budget (revised) for 2020-21 has been spent in the first 4 months.
2. 43 percent payments transactions for the month of July are pending from the Central Govt
3. Less than 12 percent of NREGA funds left with the States to implement the programme. States like Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have less than 5 percent of their allocated funds left. This is at a time when there is an unmet demand for employment of more than 27 percent and 14 percent in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra respectively. Similarly, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana have a balance of less than 10 percent.
4. 38 lakh new job cards made since April 2020. In Telangana there has been a 4.56 percent fall in the number of new job cards issued this year compared to previous year. 14.68 lakh new job cards were issued in Uttar Pradesh alone which is an 8.64 percent jump from previous year.
5. 4.17 lakh households have completed 100 days of employment. 2.26 lakh households had completed 100 days of work till July 2, 2020. It has almost doubled in just one month. However this is only 0.78 percent of those who have been employed under NREGA this year. The scale of households completing 100 days of employment is much higher in states like Andhra Pradesh (1.90 lakh), and Chhattisgarh (70,000). Roughly, 25 lakh households have completed more than 70 days of work till 02nd August. This is a testament to NREGA's continued importance and underscores the need to increase NREGA entitlement to at least 200 days per household.
6. 40 percent increase in the persondays of employment generated in the first quarter of 2020-21 compared to first quarter of 2019-20. This is yet another indicator of the importance of NREGA.

7. 1.52 Crore people who demanded work have not been provided employment. More than 12 percent unmet demand for employment in all the districts under Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (GKRA).

#### **List of Demands:**

1. The MGNREGA allocation be minimally increased by Rs. 1 Lakh Crores for the rest of FY2020-21. This will allow uninterrupted implementation till the time by which an accurate estimation of the upcoming demands can be mapped.
2. Funds should be released in advance to the Gram Panchayat to run works and Sarpanchs be given power to authorize opening of works
3. All procedures for NREGA should be substantially simplified. Entitlements for NREGA should be made applicable for an individual and not for a household, and every individual must be provided work without any restriction. Anybody willing to work must be given work for the full year and not have ANY limitation on the number of days.
4. A large number of rural residents don't have a job card and getting new job cards might be time consuming. As such, any person wanting to do NREGA work must be allowed to work irrespective of whether they have a job card. Job card registration can be done at the worksite.
5. The Government must ensure that NREGA workers receive the full minimum NREGA notified wage rate for the State within 7 days of completion of work instead of 15 days. The Schedule of Rates could be suitably modified to reduce work output required for earning the minimum wage rate by 50%, or piece-rate payment of wages should be suspended and wage payments on the basis of time rate be initiated
6. Timely payment of wages is of critical importance at present. Overcrowding in rural banks is a common problem. To ensure good practices of physical distancing in such times, NREGA wage payments should be made in cash by the Gram Panchayat. To ensure that transparency and accountability is maintained, cash payments should be made for every ward publicly on a predetermined day. The example set by the State of Odisha for releasing pension payments publicly at the Gram Panchayat can be followed.
7. All those above the age of 50 years who are not being permitted to come to work, should be paid their full minimum wage per day, for the duration of the period that they are not being permitted to work. Along the same lines, all ailing and disabled workers who are not permitted to work due to the existing medical advisory should be paid full wages till they are allowed to resume work. The Central Government should also ensure payment of 90 days of wages to all pregnant women workers in the 2nd and 3rd trimester as well as to the lactating women with infants aged less than 6 months.
8. Helpline numbers must be constituted where workers can call and register their demand for work and apply for any job card related procedures. The helpline number should be able to register demand electronically on the MIS as soon as the demand is registered. This is essential because demand for work applications are not being accepted on the ground. Each block must have a separate helpline number to cater to all the panchayats in that block. This is to ensure that there are no language issues on the phone and to avoid helplines getting over burdened. There need to be multiple people in each block running these helplines

*(Source of all figures : [www.nrega.nic.in](http://www.nrega.nic.in), Ministry of Rural Development, GoI. Reports ownloaded between 31 July - 10 August, 2020)*

## **MIGRANT WORKERS**

### **Sourced from Stranded Workers Action Network**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Migrant Crisis, Labour

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)
2. Labour Reforms
3. State Government Reforms
4. Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan
5. Migration Crisis

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

Some key observations related to the migrant crisis in various sectors apart from labour and employment:

1. Nutrition/Healthcare- Health concerns due to no access to safe drinking water (due to non-availability of fuel). Lack of proper access to maternity care during the lockdown.
2. Technology and surveillance- Workers were expected to register themselves on online websites for ration (Delhi) and travel (most state governments). Moreover, states like Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand had launched apps to support their residents stranded in other states. Issues with internet connectivity, no access to smartphones, difficulty in understanding the functioning of these apps/websites were major concerns of the workers.
3. Civil liberty, laws and governance- Workers in some parts faced police harassment and brutality, making it difficult to access food, water, ATM, banks and ration.

The unplanned, unilateral lockdown pushed millions of migrant workers in a state of crisis. The government response to provide relief to migrant workers has been largely inadequate. As SWAN's report, based on the relief work, shows- workers had to face the situation of hunger, lack of basic amenities and shortage of money. Also, the delay in travel support and the multiple contradictory government orders related to travel, further aggravated the situation. The lack of immediate and effective government response found the large section of the migrant labour force in a vulnerable state, leading to a humanitarian crisis.

While there was a delay in immediate government action, it was seen that most of the employers across the country did not give full wages or any kind of support to their workers during the nation-wide lockdown, further increasing the precarity.

**List of Demands:**

1. **Need for a National Employment Policy-** strengthening of MGNREGA. Budgets for MGNREGA must be increased by at least four times and make MGNREGA works

applicable for the entire year and not just for 100 days. The Ministry of Labour's orders stating that all workers should be deemed to be "at work" during the lockdown period and be paid accordingly must apply to MGNREGA workers as well.

2. Since a lot of migrant workers in big cities are from small towns, there is an urgent need to **boost employment opportunities in small towns**. To this end, there is a need to strengthen small towns through a sustainable urban employment guarantee programme
3. **Wage compensation** to the workers in the informal sector, at the minimum wage notified for the area, for the entire period of the lockdown, and 3 months after as the economy recovers.
4. **Social security as the right of the workers:** Formulation of a strong law under the Social Security Code- which is yet to be finalized by the Parliamentary standing committee-, recognizing and ensuring food security, healthcare, housing, maternity and old age benefits as the rights of workers
5. The state government must ensure that every primary employer strictly adheres to **paying the wages** to their contractors and to the workers.
6. Ensure advance payment of double pension for 6 months released in cash to be delivered to each pensioner immediately at her doorstep.
7. Provide full entitlements unconditionally, in advance, for all the eligible mothers under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and Janani Suraksha Yojana.
8. This livelihood support must include all segments of the population, including those both in stigmatised professions like sex work and begging, and in unseen unpaid work such as domestic work.
9. Call for ensuring job security for unskilled and semi-skilled workers in construction and small and medium scale industries. Written Employee Contracts should be made mandatory to recognize the population working in the informal sector as contract-based employees with proper tenure. This would also allow monitoring and prevention of wages not being paid in tandem with Minimum Wage Act, 1948- a practice which currently affects 42% of the workforce.
10. Expansion and temporarily relaxing the age limit for attainment of pension via Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana (PM-SYMD) which offers Rs 3000 pension to informal sector employees
11. Expansion of unemployment benefits to informal sector employees through means-testing

### **Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:**

With uncertainty about employment and on the brink of food insecurity, workers are relying on direct and immediate aid from local, state and national authorities for relief. Direct aid- in the form of direct payment or food banks has allowed families to survive in the pandemic. Such services need to continue and be operational on a district level to avoid bureaucracy and delay in an unprecedented situation where delay costs lives. Dedicated volunteers to transfer money (based on the SWAN model) can be extremely effective to not only help distressed individuals but also avoid economic collapse of small businesses surviving on regular purchase by food-insecure households

## MINORITIES

Sourced from Bebaak Collective

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Religious Minorities, Communalism, Discrimination

### **Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

The Muslim Community in India is one of the most marginalized communities in India. The Sachar Committee report found that Muslims have the lowest average monthly per capita expenditure among all socioreligious groups in the country. The past year has been particularly challenging for this community that has seen unprecedented social, religious and state discrimination and violence.

Growing communalisation, discrimination and violence has led to ghettoisation of Muslims in large metro cities, with poor living conditions and inadequate access to water sanitation and housing. The impact of these episodes of violence has also been felt most by those most marginalized within the Muslim community. Within the community, Muslim women who are already marginalized face a peculiar predicament. Struggles for equality in personal law, especially the issue of triple talaq, have seen gains, with courts denouncing the practice. At the same time, however, these wins have also been appropriated by the right-wing to further demonize Muslim men and the Muslim community in general. Muslim women have remarkably been at the forefront of both struggles, however – asserting their right to self-determination and equality as women within the community, as well as their citizenship as Muslims within the larger body politic.

The onset of the COVID 19 pandemic and response measures such as the lockdown have further strained a community already pushed to the brink. The pandemic hit the country at a time when the Muslim minority was agitating against the discriminatory citizenship law (Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019) which, in conjunction with the National Register of Citizens, poses the immediate threat of detention and possible statelessness for many marginalised people. As the pandemic disrupted the nationwide agitation which was gaining momentum, the unprecedented sit-in protests led by Muslim women across the country had to go into a hiatus, but the everyday discrimination and violence against minorities continued through the period of the lockdown.

#### **Key Issues:**

1. The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 was passed in December 2019; it is a piece of legislation that discriminates against Muslims specifically. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights called the Act “[fundamentally discriminatory](#)”. The United Nations Secretary General expressed concern that it has the potential to render a large majority of [Muslims stateless](#). The worst affected will be Muslims from the lower sects as many do not possess documentation to prove citizenship.
2. The passage of the Act led to protests across the country that were met with violence, curfews and suppression of internet services.

3. The government has used the situation of the COVID-related lockdown to crackdown on anti-CAA protestors especially in Delhi, even as those who instigated the riots in February 2020 have not been charged.
4. The lockdown has been detrimental to a large segment of dispossessed people in India, and so also to those within the Muslim community. A large proportion of Muslims in big cities like Mumbai live in slums with inadequate access to water and sanitation that is required to protect oneself from coronavirus infection.
5. The lockdown has led to loss of employment and livelihoods for informal workers, among whom marginalized communities including Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims are over-represented. Further, the dilution and/or suspension of labour laws under the pretext of reviving the economy stands to further jeopardize the health and well-being of those working in the informal sector.
6. There has been a systematic communalization of the pandemic following the incident in March where a large Muslim religious gathering was held and attended by people from different parts of the world, and became a hub of transmission of coronavirus. This has had a detrimental impact on pandemic control, with Muslim communities becoming suspicious of health department officials, as well as further worsened the trust between Muslims and the State.
7. There are several emerging reports of discrimination against Muslims in accessing healthcare and within the health system. Instances of Government hospitals designating different wards for Muslim patients, denying healthcare services to pregnant Muslim women and government hospital staff openly spewing hate against Muslims.
8. Reports have emerged of Muslims losing their already precarious livelihood due to outright discrimination and boycott eg. vegetable vendors who were rendered jobless on account of being labelled “carriers of the virus”.
9. Despite the upsurge in the number of domestic violence amongst women, as women and children were quarantined inside their homes with their oppressors and abusers, Muslim women do not have the privilege of reporting to the police as they have witnessed police brutality in their neighbourhoods. They inhabit a fearful and antagonistic relationship with the police and law which deters them from approaching state institutions. Thereby, locking them into a situation of double oppression.
10. Despite overwhelming evidence of dispossession and vulnerability of certain sections of the Muslim community, recommendations of the Sachar Committee report and Kundu Committee report remain unimplemented.
11. Budgetary allocations to the department of minority affairs remain underutilized year after year, despite the gross need for implementation of minority development schemes.

#### **List of Demands:**

1. **Roll back NRC and CAA:** We believe that the CAA is unconstitutional since it discriminates based on religion. Coupled with the NRC it bodes statelessness and mass persecution of minority groups like Muslims. Therefore, we want both the Act and the NRC process to be rolled back indefinitely.
2. An impartial investigation in connection with the Delhi riots of February 2020 must be carried out and those found guilty must be held accountable.



3. Urgent action is required to improve the socio-economic conditions of Muslims, especially the most marginalized among them. Access to health care, education, safe and clean water sanitation and housing, are all basic rights of citizenship, and efforts must be made to provide these in a way that is non-discriminatory, sensitive and context-specific.
4. Specific attention to caste-based marginalization within Muslim communities: Like all religious groups in India, caste-based discrimination continues to operate among Muslims and those most deprived belong to lower castes. Both affirmative action and concerted efforts to address development concerns among these groups is required.
5. **Access to improved educational:** The Sachar committee had reported how Muslim areas didn't have schools, and existing ones were in bad shape. Despite dedicated schemes for minority education, these remain under-utilized. The situation of the pandemic has erected more barriers and not everyone can access online education; this fosters even deeper inequality and worsens the situation of those already lagging behind. Education of children should be prioritized, through a concerted effort by state and central government.
6. **Equal opportunity commission:** The Sachar committee in line with its findings of the bleak socio-economic status of Muslims, had strongly recommended setting up of an 'Equal Opportunity Commission' address grievances and discrimination against Minorities and other marginalized communities. While an expert group was constituted for this purpose which prepared a report on how such a commission can be operationalized, it only focusses on redressal of grievances and not on prevention of discrimination through systematic reform in employment.

## **TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **Sourced from National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information**

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Transparency, Accountability, Transparent and Accountable Institutions

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. PM Cares Fund
2. Various relief and financial assistance schemes under PMGKY
3. Atma Nirbhar Scheme

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

#### **1. Right to Information Act:**

With the entire nation going into a total lockdown on 25 March 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19, millions of individuals across the country were deprived of income generating opportunities. For the poor and vulnerable, the national economic and health crisis has led them to become increasingly dependent on government relief and welfare programmes to access their basic rights and entitlements. In such a scenario, proper functioning of Information Commissions is vital to ensure that people are able to access information about the functioning of the government, including various welfare schemes. Assessments conducted by Satrak Nagarik Sangathan [1] and CHRI found that the COVID-19 induced lockdown severely impacted the functioning of the Information Commissions. Between the period March 25, 2020 and May 15, 2020, 21 out of 29 information commissions did not hold any hearings. Only the Central Information Commission, and four state commissions were holding hearings and disposing appeals/complaints on all matters. While, three State Information Commissions were available only for urgent matters or those involving life or liberty. Websites of 11 commissions out of 29 had no information/notification regarding the functioning of Information Commissions. As a result, effectively in most places, people had no recourse if their right to information was violated.

#### **2. Proactive Disclosure of Information regarding welfare schemes:**

Several large schemes and programmes were announced under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana and Atma Nirbhar Scheme. Very little, if any, information is available in the public domain regarding the utilization of the funds in violation of section 4 of the RTI Act. In fact the media has reported large delays and under utilisation of the schemes. In fact both these large schemes are funded through loans by the World Bank and even the requirement therein to publicly disclose information about implementation is not being followed.

#### **3. PM CARES Fund:**

The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund was created in March 2020 with the intention to combat, contain and provide relief measures for the COVID-19 pandemic in India. Since its inception, the PM CARES Fund has been shrouded in secrecy, raising several concerns regarding the utilisation of the Fund, purportedly meant for public welfare. In fact even a copy of the trust deed vide which the fund was set up has been denied under the RTI Act claiming that the fund is not a public authority! This not only militates against the principle of public accountability but appears to be contrary to the RTI Act, as a majority of the

trustees are ministers in their ex-officio capacity thereby effectively ensuring control of the government. Further, it is hosted within the premises of the PMO, uses the national emblem and the domain name of the website uses the same suffix as official websites (gov.in). Information regarding donors, amount received and utilization of the fund is not available on the PM Cares website or any other government website and has been denied under the RTI Act.

#### **4. Accountability laws and structures remain non-starters**

Despite passage of several years, the Lokpal has pretty much been a non-starter, first due to the delay of 4 years in the appointment process and then due to the government delaying promulgation of rules for another year! The Whistleblower Protection Law which was enacted in 2014 is yet to be operationalised by promulgating rules. The Covid crisis showed how such a law could have been of immense use as from across India there were horrifying reports of the pathetic state of health care facilities, under reporting and fudging of data, negligence and refusal to treat those suffering from Covid. In fact several HCs had to step in to oversee administration of hospitals.

#### **List of Demands:**

##### **1. Effective Functioning of Information Commissions:**

- Although challenges thrown up by the crisis are immense, Commissions like the CIC, have shown that it is possible for commissioners to continue to hear and adjudicate on cases despite a lockdown. It is absolutely critical that all information commissions conduct hearings and dispose cases to ensure people can exercise their fundamental right to information and put in place mechanisms that use people friendly technology to hold hearings in case physical hearings are not possible
- Even as commissions become fully functional, cases related to life and liberty - especially matters regarding food distribution, social security, health and COVID 19-related issues – must be prioritized and taken up in a time-bound manner by the ICs for hearing and disposal. This would require the commissions to set up systems to identify and fast track such cases.
- Commissions must direct public authorities to disseminate relevant information under Section 4 of the RTI Act in local languages and in the most accessible manner.
- During a time where physical distancing is the norm, State governments must take immediate steps to create portals for the submission RTI Applications and First Appeals modelled on the Central Government portal : <https://rtionline.gov.in/> to ensure that people can continue to file RTI application and seek information.

##### **2. Proactive Disclosure and Monitoring:**

- All information regarding implementation of schemes and utilisation of funds should be made available on government websites. It must also be widely disseminated through off-line modes like sms, whatsapp, public announcements and prominent poster/boards/wall paintings in villages and slums and at points of disbursement such as ration shops, banks and hospitals to ensure that those without access to the internet are also able to obtain the necessary information.
- Transparency is essential to ensure money is spent on the most pressing priority needs during the crisis. Relevant governments should proactively disclose information about money received and disbursed under various relief funds, including the PM CARES Fund and various Chief Minister relief funds, to enable public scrutiny. Declare all such funds to be public authorities under the RTI Act.

- Proactive disclosure of all foreign aid, bilateral and multi-lateral, and loans received during the COVID period and the uses to which they have been put in the country

**3. Operationalise accountability laws and institutions:**

- Properly operationalise the Lokpal Act
  - Operationalise the Whistle Blowers Protection Act
  - Enact the Grievance Redressal Bill (Right of Citizens for Time Bound Delivery of Goods and Services and Redressal of their Grievances Bill, 2011), which lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha in 2014, to provide for an accessible, decentralized and responsive system for time- bound redress of citizens' grievances in the states and at the centre, to empower people to realize their rights and entitlements.
  - Rigorous implementation of the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy for all legislative and policy making and reform, especially in light of the Supreme Court's observations that the draft document must be translated into local languages for the consultation to be widespread and meaningful.
  - Revive and re-introduce the National Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill in order to create a credible mechanism for receiving and inquiring into complaints of misbehaviour and incapacity of judges of the constitutional courts
4. Roll back regressive amendments made to various laws like the IT Act, RP Act, RBI Act and Companies Act which enable unlimited anonymous funding of political parties through electoral bonds by corporates including Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies.
  5. Complete transparency about all proposals considered, plans approved, consultancies and contracts issued and other actions taken including funding approved and disbursed for the Central Vista Project in Delhi
  6. Complete transparency about the quantum of land (individual village and town-wise) included in land banks and those handed over to the Department of Industries and Commerce for industrial development in Jammu and Kashmir
  7. Proactive disclosure to all information related to government action & response, spending, testing, deaths, details of agreements signed with private hospitals with regard to COVID-19

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Sourced from Federation of Indian Women

**Sector/Issue, Tags:** Women Rights, Discrimination, Violence

**Notable new Schemes / Guidelines/ Financial Allocations announced during COVID-19 period:**

1. Pension Allotment
2. Rations and Free cooked meals to tide over the problem of hunger and starvation

**Brief Status of concerned Sector during COVID-19:**

### **Key Issues:**

1. Economic Crisis: There has been a sharp decline in family incomes as there is a loss of employment due to the sudden declaration of the lockdown.
2. Rise in crimes/violence against women: starvation, disease, lack of access to healthcare and unknown mental trauma during this period. According to National Commission for Women, **116** complaints were received between March 2-8, 2020, that increased to **257** between March 23- April 1, 2020; **69** of these complaints were of domestic violence. Other complaints included right to live with dignity, which increased to **77** from 35 cases earlier
3. With loss of livelihoods, women have faced starvation, indebtedness, extreme stress, unsafe migration and non-COVID-19 morbidities beyond the reach of treatment.
4. Over **70%** of the public health system comprises of frontline women workers, as health workers, cleaners, paramedics, caregivers, sanitation workers and are among the lowest paid and at the bottom of the health hierarchy.

### **Assessment:**

1. The government response has been half-hearted and patchy.
2. The withdrawal of rations, cooked meals, access to healthcare has had major repercussions. There are regular reports of women losing their children at birth, and sometimes their own lives, due to inaccessibility of healthcare services.
3. The regulation and capping of fees in private hospitals has been skewed. It was an attempt to regulate prices of Covid patients, but the parallel rise of fees in other services has impacted women most. There have also been several cases of pregnant women being turned away from hospitals on trying for admission at the time of delivery in some cases leading to their deaths.
4. With the increasing numbers of COVID-19 patients, health-care workers including nurses (of whom approximately **88.9% are women**) remain much more vulnerable to the virus. They had limited/no access to basic protective equipment and infrastructure.
5. The response to the government has been of repression or of announcements that were implemented on paper. The role of the civil society in fighting for rations, pensions, access to healthcare, wages shows the gravity of the challenges that women have had to face.

### List of Demands:

1. Strengthen the eco-redressal system of services and build coherence across all institutional services of the state (helplines, legal aid, police reporting, transport services, shelters, etc.).
2. A gender lens to provision of economic and social security relief measures, including food security and other special measures for vulnerable women, who are the last to eat in most families. Married, single, differently-abled and all other inclusive categories of non-binary need to be provided with life-saving and livelihood packages with dignity.
3. On the political front, the long standing demand for including women in policy making needs to be re-iterated and enforced. Till women are not allowed to voice solutions to problems of hunger, security, access to healthcare, discrimination and marginalisation, the exclusion and invisibilisation of their identity will continue. The stakeholders need to assert their voices.
4. Ensure Universal Maternity Entitlements and remove conditionalities that exclude women from benefiting from its provisions.
5. Remove unconstitutional conditionalities in any welfare scheme. Prioritise all vulnerable groups including single women and minority women headed households.
6. Treat women as Project Affected Persons in all relief and rehabilitation measures, Ensure legal and financial aid and alternative means of employment and livelihood for women displaced due to infrastructure, urbanisation and industrial projects.
7. A minimum universal non-contributory pension of 50% of minimum wage for all women above the age of 55 years and for all women in vulnerable categories irrespective of age.

### Action Oriented Engagement & Recommendations:

1. Regularise ICDS, ASHA, Midday Meal and other scheme workers with wages, pensions and other social security benefits.
2. Provide hot, cooked, nutritious meals with eggs and fruit or take home rations for all pregnant and lactating mothers at Anganwadi Centres.
3. Ensure at least Rs. 6000 as Maternity Entitlement to all pregnant and lactating women as was the provision in the NFSA.
4. Enact legislation for empowerment of the Transgender community and adequate economic and social support for the LGBTQ community.
5. Ensure autonomous functioning of National and State Commissions for Women with members selected through an institutionalised, independent and transparent process and no political appointees. Ensure 33% reservation for women in all commissions.
6. Ensure prevention of all crimes against women by providing adequate budget allocation and support survivors of crimes against women. Provide adequate fast track courts to ensure justice in such cases within a legally bound time frame.
7. Universalise old age pension and ensure pension for all single women starting particularly with those from the vulnerable sections.

#### Calls for Solidarity:

There are a lot of women led movements seeking justice. A few need critical attention:

1. The deforestation caused by mining rights given across the country from Kashmir to Kerala, need immediate attention.

2. Calls for action, like that given by NFIW to stop child and human trafficking due to the lockdown needs to be addressed.
3. The helpline proposed to be set up for senior citizens within two days to be also made available for pregnant women to enable them to access medical facilities and to arrange for transportation for them to visit hospitals for check-ups, delivery and post-delivery consultation, whenever required. The helpline number shall be publicized adequately in the newspapers and social media and also through Delhi Police wherever possible.

## **ANNEXURE**

**Annexure 1:** Addition references to actions of government on environment, during COVID period:

### **Further references**

#### **Coal Package**

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<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/governance/coastal-regulation-zone-notification-what-development-are-we-clearing-our-coasts-for-63061>

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<https://www.thekashmirmonitor.net/govt-creates-jk-forests-dev-corp-company-to-take-over-erstwhile-sfc/>

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<https://science.thewire.in/environment/indias-environment-ministry-unlocked-many-protected-areas-during-the-lockdown/>

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