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DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



TALKING POINTS

IN A meeting of BJP general secretaries with party president J P Nadda Thursday, the topic of discussion was how party cadres could help migrant workers struggling to reach homes.

QUARANTINED

A SUPREME Court judge moved into self-quarantine with family members after the cook at the judge's official residence tested positive Thursday.

ALMA MATER'S AWARD

NATIONAL HEALTH Authority CEO Dr Indu Bhushan has been selected by the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association for the Global Achievement Award.

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

9419142N LNK DUN NARAYAN SHRESTHA 1415 MAY On this day 9419142N LNK Dun Narayan Shrestha of 1/11 Gorkha Rifles (BATALIK) made the supreme sacrifice during 'OP VIJAY' in May 1999 in a true act of valour.

A.P. STATE WAREHOUSING CORPORATION (A State Government Undertaking) D.No. 55-17-3, Stalin Corporate Building, 2nd Floor, Behind Autonagar Bus Stand, VIJAYAWADA - 520 007.

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JAIPUR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY India Circle, Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg, Jaipur-302004 NOTICE INVITING BID NIB NO.: EE ROB / RUB-II / 01 / 2020-21

FM claim of MNREGS spike true only for May, April saw a fall

HARISH DAMODARAN & NUSHAIBA IQBAL NEW DELHI, MAY 14

ANNOUNCING THE second tranche of the coronavirus relief package, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday that enrolment of workers under the MNREGS has increased 40-50% "compared to May last year".

However, an analysis of data on the MNREGS public portal shows that both the number of people to avail of work under the flagship rural employment scheme and the number of days they were employed has fallen in this financial year starting April till now, compared to 2019-20.

This financial year, 1.06 crore households have got 13.59 crore person-days of work under the MNREGS so far. As against this, 1.55 crore households had got 24.66 crore person-days of work in April 2019 alone.

"The 40-50% increase the minister referred to is only for the past few days. Not much work could be taken up in April because the focus of everybody, including states, was on enforcing the lockdown."

Sitharaman also said that 14.62 crore person-days of work had been generated under the MNREGS till May 13. "The data in the public portal is only up to May 12. The minister's figure is



A migrant family on the way to Chhattisgarh near Pune railway station. Arul Horizon

not only more recent, she has also mentioned that 2.33 crore wage seekers were offered work just yesterday (i.e. on May 13). The uptick in employment will be visible in the coming days," the official said.

The main driver of the MNREGS employment will be the migrant workers returning back to their villages from cities and industrial centres. "States have been told to register liberally, as per the provisions of the MNREGS. Anyone seeking work under the programme should be given employment, irrespective of whether they have a job card or if the same is active or not," the official added.

On paper, MNREGS guaran-

tees 100 days of employment to adult members of any rural household that "demands" such employment. Critics allege this basic principle, of the programme being demand-driven and self-selecting, has rarely been implemented on the ground.

"The demand for work is going to be high, more so from the returning migrant labourers who need to find immediate employment. May and June are also lean months for agriculture, when the rabi crop has already been harvested and the monsoon not fully arrived," the official pointed out.

According to the MNREGS public data portal, the number of person-days of work under the scheme in 2019-20 rose from

24.66 crore in April to 33.17 crore in May and 30.47 crore in June, before falling to 18.94 crore, 14.98 crore, 14.37 crore and 13.52 crore in the subsequent months coinciding with the kharif cropping season.

This time, MNREGS work demand is expected to go up, with this getting reflected in many inactive job cards turning active. Currently, out of the 13.74 crore MNREGS job cards issued, only 7.66 crore are "active".

In 2019-20, 5.48 crore households were employed in MNREGS works. The average days of employment provided per household were 48.39, with only 40.61 lakh households completing 100 days of wage employment.

447 new cases in TN, 2 deaths in Chennai

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE CHENNAI, MAY 14

TAMIL NADU on Thursday reported 447 Covid-19 cases, taking its tally to 9,674. There were two deaths reported, both of them in state capital Chennai.

Chennai also accounted for most of the fresh cases-363. Among the active cases, Chennai had 4,834 cases and neighbouring district of Thiruvallur with 410 cases top the list.

Among the total 66 deaths reported in the state, Chennai had 44 and neighbouring district

Chengalpet had four cases. Among the positive cases were nine people who came back from abroad and 11 who returned from Maharashtra.

State Health Minister C Vijayabaskar said Tamil Nadu continues to top the sample testing charts in India.

"While India has a total of 19 lakh samples tested, Tamil Nadu alone tested over 3 lakh," he said.

Quoting observations from a panel of medical experts, Vijayabaskar said the state had the lowest death rate in the country (0.67 per cent) as a result of early diagnosis through contact tracing.

Dhankhar seeks details of interim KMC board from Mamata again

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, MAY 14

GOVERNOR JAGDEEP Dhankhar on Thursday once again sought information from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee about a caretaker board of administrators set up to run the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

In a letter to Banerjee, Dhankhar criticised her "non-responsive" approach towards the Raj Bhavan, and said he was still awaiting information he had sought a week ago on the matter.

On May 7, Dhankhar had invoked Article 167 of the Constitution to seek information from the Chief Minister about the appointment of the administrative board headed by state minister Firhad Hakim, who was also the city mayor before the tenure of the regular board of the civic body expired. Article 167 lays down the duties of the Chief Minister to furnish information to the governor.

"Your continued non-responsive stance when it comes to the performance of 'duties' under Constitution towards the Gover-



Mamata Banerjee & Jagdeep Dhankhar

nor in terms of Article 167 is unfortunate and contrary to your oath under Article 164 and against the essence and spirit of the Constitution and surely cannot be countenanced," Dhankhar wrote. The administrators were appointed on May 6 to run the day-to-day affairs of the corporation after the civic body elections were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, a single-judge bench allowed the panel to function for four weeks. On May 12, a two-judge division bench ordered the caretaker body to continue running the KMC till July 20.

NON-PDS CARD HOLDERS TO FOODGRAINS

Jharkhand fears problems in migrant aid

ABHISHEK ANGAD RANCHI, MAY 14

THE JHARKHAND government admitted on Thursday that there could be problems with implementation of the Centre's scheme to provide free foodgrains to all migrant labourers, including those who don't hold ration cards, for the months of May and June.

On Wednesday, the state announced distribution of 10 kg of rice, pulses, oil and salt to returning migrants. Apart from reconciling this with the Centre's package, of 5 kg of rice and wheat per person and 1 kg of pulses per family per month, the Jharkhand government admits it has been facing problems in reaching those not holding ration cards. While the Centre will pick up the tab for the free foodgrains, the implementation has been left to states.

Jharkhand Chief Secretary Sukhdev Singh said: "We have announced allocation of Rs 550 packets to migrant labourers, each comprising 10 kg rice, 2 kg pulses, 1 litre oil and 1 kg salt. Once we get clarity on distribution by the Centre, we can adjust it against the books if it is in cash. If allocation is through grains, we will have to decide a course of action."

Non-ration card holders are estimated to number around nine lakh in Jharkhand. They include people who applied for the cards but could not get them. On March 23, Jharkhand announced 10 kg of

rice per family to these applicants, at Re 1 per kg. However, with nearly two months gone, the Food, Public Distribution and Civil Supplies Department admits only 67% of the nine lakh PDS card applicants got the allocation for April. In May so far, only 7.76% of the applicants have been covered.

The secretary of the department, Arun Singh, said he was waiting for details on the Centre's announcement. "As far as the delay in distribution to non-card holders is concerned, we have faced issues like authentication. Plus around two lakh people (of the nine lakh total) have applied for cards since the lockdown. We are working on it too."

Haldhar Mahato, a member of the Jharkhand Food Commission, which regulates the implementation of the National Food Security Act in the state, blames the delay on initial confusion over who would handle the rations. Initially, block-level committees were formed for this, but later the task was handed over to village heads, and finally to PDS dealers. Mahato said: "The process to operationalise non-PDS distribution took more than 20 days. If returning migrants are supposed to get rations, the state needs to build an effective system." Development economist Jean Dreez wondered how the government would identify the beneficiaries. "Those who are in government shelters will be easy to identify, but it will be a problem to locate other migrants."

'Staying at home will not help'

Gandhinagar: Indicating significant relaxations in lockdown norms after May 17, Deputy CM Nitin Patel Thursday said people cannot sit at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic and that it is necessary to start economic activities in the interest of Gujarat's livelihood. "Experts in the world are saying that the coronavirus pandemic is going to continue in the world for a long time... Therefore, the interest of 6.30 crore

citizens of Gujarat and their livelihood are important. Till now, we have been strictly implementing lockdown. Now a stage has come where we have become acquainted with coronavirus... Now, if business, jobs, agriculture, animal husbandry, labour work continue to be stopped, then not only a person or his family will be in bad condition, but the state's economic condition will also become very weak," said Patel. ENS

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