

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THE HINDU PAGE: 01

Attacks on ships 'unacceptable', says India

Three ships struck by U.S. had strong Indian links; were catering to the nation's oil needs

Centre summons U.S. Embassy Charge d'Affaires; lodges 'strong protest' over use of 'lethal force'

Meanwhile, Trump accuses Tehran of 'totally unacceptable' drone attacks on Indian ships

M. Kalyanaram
Kallol Bhattacharjee
CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

While condemning the U.S. attacks on three ships with Indian crew that killed three Indian seafarers, Esmail Baghaei, a spokesperson for Iran's Foreign Affairs Ministry, on Friday, described them as "attacks on Indian commercial vessels."

Publicly available information shows that the three ships, though foreign flagged, have deeper Indian links than just the crew on board, including potentially in ownership and management. Two ships were serving Indian ports, facilitating Iranian oil trade with India.

On Thursday, the External Affairs Ministry had said the ships were foreign-flagged and indicated that the deaths were incidental



Sushila Devi, wife of Shivanand Chaurasia, an Indian seafarer killed in U.S. attacks, mourns in Deoria, U.P., on Friday. REUTERS

collateral damage in the conflict, tamping down any notion of targeting of Indians by the U.S.

On Friday, however, for the second time in three days, the Ministry summoned the Charge d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy Jason Meeks and lodged a "strong protest". "The Ministry once again conveyed its deep concern over the

use of lethal and deadly force against civilian shipping. Such actions are unacceptable and undermine the safety, security and stability of international maritime commerce in a sensitive region at a difficult time," said the Ministry.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump accused Iran of carrying out "totally unacceptable"

A deal 'has never been closer', says Araghchi

Stanly Johny

A day after U.S. President Donald Trump backed away from a threatened attack on Iran, claiming progress in talks, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Friday that Washington and Tehran have "never been

closer" to reaching a preliminary agreement.

"The Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding has never been closer. All details will be shared in due course," Mr. Araghchi said.

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drone attacks on Indian ships "leaving the Strait of Hormuz".

'Flags of convenience' Shipping experts say many Indians own and operate ships catering to India's oil needs served by Russian and, to a smaller extent, Iranian oil. Since the U.S. has imposed sanctions on the two countries, these

ships are registered in countries that are called 'flags of convenience' with minimum scrutiny. Using such flags and frequent changes of names, flags and ownership are a feature of such ships, globally.

Marivex, which was hit by a U.S. missile on Monday, is owned by Arihant Shipping registered in Panama, as per Equas data-

base. *Opencorporates.com* lists six Indian names associated with the company - director, president and so on.

Marivex was one of the first ships to transit the Strait of Hormuz carrying Iranian oil and was bound for Mangalore. Since then, it has served Karwar, too.

The *Settebello*, struck on Wednesday, was the ship on which three Indian seafarers died. Owned by a company in UAE, its manager, IOS Marine FZE, had disputed U.S. Centcom's version that the ship's crew "repeatedly failed to comply with directions from American sources", saying no warning or call was received by the ship and no contact whatsoever was made by the U.S. Navy with the ship.

Settebello had been flagged by the United Against Nuclear Iran, a U.S.-based non-profit, which had included it in its

'Ghost Armada' list for trading in Iranian oil. The IOS Marine statement says the company had no affiliation with Iran or Iranian oil and sought evidence of U.S. Navy contacting the ship.

Settebello has changed its flag ten times - nearly all of them flags of convenience - names five times, and ownership three times. It has been managed by ship management companies located in India in the past. Its current owner owns another ship which had been managed by Global Tankers based in India.

Global Tankers was sanctioned by the U.S. for Iran links. Meanwhile, *Jalveer*, the Guinea Bissau-registered ship struck on Thursday, has publicly listed a One Person Company in Mumbai as responsible for safety compliance.

Its last port of call, as per *marinetraffic.com*, was Dighi in Maharashtra.

GS 3: DEFENCE THE HINDU PAGE: 04

Project Kusha, our indigenous air defence shield, will be a game changer, says Rajnath

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday described the indigenous Project Kusha air defence programme as a "game changer" for India's security architecture, asserting that its importance had already been demonstrated during Operation Sindoor.

Addressing scientists and officials in Hyderabad, after inaugurating the Advanced Weapon System Complex at the Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) Defence Research & Development Laboratory (DRDL) in the Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Missile Complex, Mr. Singh said India's

indigenous air defence capabilities had successfully thwarted enemy intentions during the operation.

"Today I predict that Project Kusha will be a game changer for India's security scenario. It is a world-class indigenous air defence system. Just as the Govardhan hill protected the entire region of Braj in the *Dvapara Yuga*, our air defence system provided a protective umbrella during that period (Operation Sindoor)," he said.

Project Kusha is a long-range air defence missile system being developed by the DRDO to provide a comprehensive shield against a wide range of aerial threats.

The Defence Minister



Rajnath Singh

praised the DRDO's Missile Systems and Strategic Systems cluster for strengthening India's technological excellence, strategic autonomy and national security. He said indigenous systems such as Akash and BrahMos had proved India's capability to compete

in the global defence technology ecosystem.

Changing warfare

Highlighting the changing nature of warfare, Mr. Singh said emerging technologies such as precision-strike systems, integrated air defence networks, hypersonic weapons, autonomous platforms, artificial intelligence and electronic warfare were reshaping modern battlefields. In this environment, he stressed the need for both resilience and deterrence.

Referring to the government's ambitious "Mission Sudarshan Chakra", announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his Independence Day address in 2025, Mr. Singh said the

initiative would establish a multi-layered missile defence shield capable of protecting military assets, critical infrastructure and civilian establishments across the country.

"The system will provide robust protection while ensuring citizens face minimal inconvenience. It will also possess the capability to deliver a decisive response whenever required," he said.

The Defence Minister lauded the DRDO's progress in indigenous missile technologies, stating that the recent successes in strategic and tactical weapon programmes reflected India's growing self-reliance and confidence in defence manufacturing.

GS 2: POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 06

Equality of treatment for Persons with Disabilities

Addressing the digital divide through the Digital India Mission, India has marched on towards becoming a global “best practice” model of a digital welfare state. Yet, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) remain largely excluded from this promise of universal outreach. Disability pensions, contrary to the very principles underlying disability rights, are determined not by the nature or extent of disability but by domicile, the discretionary decisions of State governments, and cumbersome bureaucratic processes. As a result, a vulnerable section of citizens continues to remain outside the ambit of a welfare architecture that otherwise prides itself on inclusivity and last-mile delivery.

An inadequate safety net

The 2011 Census recorded 2.68 crore PwDs. Today, accounting for population growth and changing disease profiles, their number is conservatively estimated at 4.5 crore-6 crore. Although the Supreme Court of India has recognised the right to live with dignity as a fundamental right and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 provides legal protection, disability benefits – especially pensions – remain fragmented, discretionary, and inadequate. As a result, the Indra Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme covers only a small fraction of PwDs, while pension amounts in most States range from just ₹300 to ₹500 a month, with a few offering ₹1,000-₹3,000.

India spends barely 0.02% of GDP on disability welfare including pensions. South Africa spends 0.12%-0.15% of GDP (six times more); Brazil 0.45%-0.50% (20 times more); OECD countries 2.2% (110 times more) and Australia 0.35%-0.40% (20 times more).

Beyond politics, sound economics demands the inclusion of PwDs. The World Bank and UNDP estimate that low- and middle-income countries lose 3%-7% of GDP when PwDs are excluded from education, employment, and social security. Disability income improves household stability, rural consumption, and labour participation. Studies show fiscal multipliers of 1.4-1.6, while the 2025 Pro Bono Economics report found that the socio-economic returns from disability pensions exceed their costs by nearly 48%. Far from being a welfare expense, disability pensions are an investment and an effective economic stimulus.

India must establish a Minimum Universal Disability Pension Floor Rate (MUDPFR) to give effect to the state's constitutional obligation, under Article 41, to provide public assistance to persons with disabilities, and to operationalise Section 24 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which guarantees adequate



Sushil Kumar

Former Secretary, Government of India, and an Advocate in the Supreme Court and High Court

India must adopt a minimum universal disability pension floor rate

social security, including pension benefits. Such a measure would translate the promise of inclusive growth and “Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas” into reality by shifting disability pensions from a matter of charity and discretion to a matter of citizenship rights. While ensuring that no disabled person receives less than a minimum pension regardless of where they live, a MUDPFR would still allow States to provide additional top-ups.

This is not an unrealistic proposal. South Africa provides a national disability grant with uniform eligibility norms; Brazil's BPC guarantees a national minimum income; and Australia and New Zealand operate nationwide disability pension systems. Several developing countries, including Kenya, Rwanda, Thailand and Indonesia, also provide disability income support at the national level. International experience shows that centrally set standards promote uniformity, universality and portability.

A MUDPFR of ₹8,000 per month for 40 lakh beneficiaries would cost about ₹38,400 crore annually (0.08% of GDP), while ₹10,000 for 65 lakh beneficiaries would cost ₹78,000 crore. Even a pension of ₹15,000 per month would keep expenditure below 0.2% of GDP. Such spending is fiscally manageable when compared with allocations for food subsidies (₹2.05 lakh crore), rural development (₹1.80 lakh crore), tax concessions and revenue foregone (₹1.72 lakh crore), and infrastructure (₹11.11 lakh crore). Yet, disability pensions and inclusion continue to receive only a tiny fraction of public expenditure.

From fragmentation to integration

The current disability pension system, shared between the Ministry of Rural Development and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, leads to duplication, delays and diffused accountability. Countries that have faced similar challenges have addressed them through a single national authority – South Africa's SASSA, Australia's NDIA, Brazil's INSS and Ireland's Department of Social Protection. India too needs a National Disability Pension Authority to oversee eligibility norms, a national registry, portability, digital integration, grievance redress and State-wise performance monitoring – one standard, one system, one nation.

Implementing a robust disability pension system would strengthen India's bid for a UN Security Council seat by translating its commitments into action under Article 28 of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ILO Recommendation No. 202, SDG 1.3, and the G-20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, all of which endorse social protection as a cornerstone of inclusive development.

Combining pensions with employment

support can move persons with disabilities from mere survival to productive participation. A MUDPFR could also yield economic benefits. Countries such as Singapore, South Korea, South Africa and Brazil integrate disability pensions with employment and social security systems. India should similarly strengthen its fragmented Disability Employment Incentive Scheme. Models abroad include employer tax incentives in Nigeria, the U.K.'s Access to Work programme, and Australia's wage subsidies. Existing schemes such as PM-DAKSH, NAPS and State-level employer incentives provide a foundation for expansion.

Constitutional imperative

A MUDPFR would give effect to the Constitution's guarantees of equality, equal protection, dignity and the right to life. India has already standardised major welfare programmes – from food security and health care to PM-KISAN and pensions – and delivers benefits at scale through DBT and UPI. The capacity and technology exist. What is needed is the political will to prioritise dignity. Disability pensions remain one of the few entitlements determined by where a person lives. If dignity is a constitutional right, geography cannot decide the minimum support for survival.

More than an economic or administrative reform, a MUDPFR is a moral one. It affirms that persons with disabilities are rights-bearing citizens, not recipients of charity. By transforming the state from a benevolent provider into a constitutional guarantor, it strengthens dignity, inclusion and citizenship.

Should India continue with a system in which disability pensions vary according to State budgets, political priorities and bureaucratic complexities, leaving persons with disabilities vulnerable to hardship? Or should the Republic guarantee a minimum level of support for all? A Viksit Bharat cannot leave its most vulnerable citizens at the mercy of a postcode lottery. Federalism cannot be a justification for inequality.

A MUDPFR is the next logical step in India's welfare architecture, building on rights-based entitlements enabled by digital inclusion and DBT. It would humanise the state, uphold the dignity of persons with disabilities and strengthen the Republic.

Over the past 75 years, India has steadily expanded its welfare state in pursuit of social justice. With the necessary platforms and delivery systems now in place, the time has come to secure the foundation. The real question is whether India recognises dignity for persons with disabilities as a constitutional right and a collective obligation. That promise is long overdue, and a MUDPFR offers a way to fulfil it.

GS 2: POLITY

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The 8th CPC — a chance to reform pay commissions

As India moves toward the 8th Central Pay Commission (CPC), public discussion has largely centred on familiar themes – fitment factors, salary revisions and arrears. Yet, the larger question may not be how much compensation should increase, but whether the framework for determining public compensation remains coherent, equitable, and fiscally sustainable. This is not merely an administrative matter. The manner in which the state structures salaries, allowances and pensions reflects broader institutional priorities and influences public confidence in governance.

The framework deficit
Over the decades, Pay Commissions have become far more than wage-revision exercises. Their recommendations shape inter-service parity, long-term fiscal commitments and the institutional balance within the state. Yet, the process remains narrow, with a small, time-bound body tasked with evaluating a diverse ecosystem of civil, military and technical services, largely on the basis of representations from the services themselves. A key challenge is the absence of a common evaluative framework. Services operate under different structures, career trajectories and working conditions, but there is no universally accepted method for comparing risk, responsibility, technical complexity or career progression. As a result, the system often seeks parity without clearly defining its basis.

This challenge is most visible in questions of parity. Officers across services with very different career paths and responsibilities may, at certain stages, receive comparable compensation. The issue is not one of competition between services but institutional coherence. If parity is to be maintained, the principles governing it must be transparent, consistent and objectively justified.

The comparison between civilian services and the armed forces illustrates this complexity. Military careers follow a sharply pyramidal structure, with limited promotional opportunities



Prem Kumar Nair
Retired Indian Army officer (colonel) with an interest in governing architecture and systems

The 8th Central Pay Commission should reform compensation frameworks, not merely salaries

and earlier retirement. Civilian services generally offer broader avenues for advancement and longer careers. Aligning compensation across such different systems requires careful consideration of these structural differences.

Another significant trend is the reduction in experience required for senior administrative positions. While faster career progression may reflect changing governance needs, complex policy challenges still demand institutional memory and seasoned judgment. Efficiency is important, but it cannot fully substitute for experience. Questions also arise over allowances. While they are intended to compensate for hardship, remoteness or operational risk, there is no uniform and transparent framework for assessing such conditions across services. This can create disparities that are difficult to justify and may foster perceptions of inconsistency.

Non-Functional Upgradation (NFU) raises a related concern. By allowing financial advancement without a corresponding increase in responsibility, it weakens the link between role, accountability and compensation. Though introduced to address slower promotion avenues, the NFU continues to generate debate over equity and institutional rationale.

The pension challenge
Pensions add another layer of complexity. India currently operates multiple pension systems, including legacy defined-benefit schemes, contributory plans for newer entrants, and separate arrangements for elected representatives. According to the Reserve Bank of India's State Finances Report (2023), salaries, pensions and interest payments consume a large share of State expenditure, limiting fiscal space for development. As a result, concerns about sustainability and inter-generational equity are becoming increasingly important.

Taken together, these issues highlight the need for a more coherent approach to public compensation. At present, pay frameworks for the executive, legislature and judiciary evolve

through different processes. While constitutionally distinct, this fragmentation can create inconsistencies and reduce transparency in compensation decisions.

Public trust depends not only on fairness, but also on transparency and explainability.

A new compensation architecture
Many countries have gradually moved towards continuous and institutionalised mechanisms for reviewing public sector compensation. Independent authorities, clearly defined benchmarks and periodic review mechanisms have replaced infrequent, large-scale revisions. India's decadal Pay Commission model may therefore warrant reconsideration.

A more durable framework – whether a National Compensation Authority or a specialised public service body – could bring greater consistency to public sector pay. Rather than be a centralising authority, it could establish common principles for assessing responsibility, experience and hardship while preserving flexibility for different services and States.

Importantly, any such reform must respect India's federal structure. States should retain autonomy over implementation while operating within a broader framework of transparency, comparability and fiscal discipline. Greater coherence across branches of government, without affecting constitutional independence, would strengthen both credibility and public confidence.

Ultimately, public compensation is not simply about salaries and pensions. It is part of the larger relationship between the state and the citizen. In a democratic system, compensation structures must not only be financially sustainable, but also publicly explainable.

The 8th Pay Commission presents an opportunity to move beyond periodic revision and engage with these deeper structural questions. Whether that opportunity is utilised meaningfully may shape public trust in institutional governance for years to come.

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No guarantee of right to work?

Hailed as one of the most important social welfare laws for making the State accountable for providing dignified livelihoods, MGNREGA 2005 is set to be replaced by VB-G RAM G 2025. Sections of workers argue that the new Act strips the scheme of its core promise, the right to work backed by a guarantee, writes **Rishita Khanna**

Until 2007, SriLakshmi worked in jowar fields in Belagavi's Athani taluk for ₹40 a day and a ration of two kg of grain. Men alongside her earned ₹65 and the same ration. During lean months when work dried up, she joined nearly 50 others from the taluk migrating over 100 km to Kolhapur in Maharashtra, where they worked for over 60 days, cutting leather into straps and soles and finishing Kolhapuri chappals, earning ₹120 a day with accommodation.

For SriLakshmi and thousands who migrated for work, equal wages, guaranteed employment within 15 days, and compensation for denial was unthinkable. These promises formed the basis of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA).



Women have accounted for over 58% of MGNREGA workers for the last five years. **ARUN KULKARNI**

Right to work

Hailed with the social message of "Har hath ka kaam mile, kaam ka pura daam mile" (every hand should get work, and every worker should get the full value of their labour), MGNREGA was introduced in 2006 to legally guarantee the "right to work", combat chronic poverty and serve as a social security net, with workers saying it gave them something they were long deprived of - bargaining power.

"It was MGNREGA that first recognised women as workers in their own right. That was when many of us first saw our names on job cards and opened bank and post office accounts in our own names," SriLakshmi said.



Proudly narrating the women's first collective demand for work, Bharathi Santeshi, a worker from Raichur, said 120 women had gone to the block office in Sindhanur seeking employment. "The officer had never seen so many women turn up asking for work," she said. Two days later, many were allotted work. "Four hours of work and equal income. That felt powerful. We felt equal," she said.

Women have accounted for over 58% of MGNREGA workers for the last five years, as per official data.

End of MGNREGA

After completing 20 years in February this year, MGNREGA is set to be replaced. Starting July 1, the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin), 2025 (VB-G RAM G Act) will be rolled out nationwide.

VB-G RAM G has triggered sharp resistance from sections of workers, who argue that it guarantees "unemployment" under the pretext of a guarantee scheme. Workers argue that the new Act kills the "soul" of the scheme - by shifting from a "demand-based" entitlement to a "supply-driven" model, where funds are no longer open-ended but capped.

Even before the Act is rolled out, the transition has left workers without work. The Act was ear-



It was MGNREGA that first recognised women as workers in their own right

SRI LAKSHMI, worker from Athani

lier announced to come into effect in April 2026 and was then postponed to July.

"From March till June, Form 6 was not available across gram panchayats. We were only told that new forms will come under the new Act, nothing beyond that," said Krishnappa from Raichur. "This is the peak season. The income cycle revolves around wages - from buying seeds or repaying small debts taken to surviving the lean period until the next round of work begins. If that cycle breaks, there is no way to manage even basic expenses," he said, adding that new workites were not being opened despite assurances that MGNREGA would continue until the new Act comes into effect.

125 vs 100

The scheme proposes 125 days of work, compared to the 100 days guaranteed under the MGNREGA. The government has invited objections to the draft rules ahead of rollout. However, workers say their only demand is that VB-G RAM G be immediately and unconditionally halted.

Workers and unions such as the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha said the law was passed through both Houses of Parliament in less than a week, and the same continues in the draft rules process. The rules, released on May 23, 2026, gave stakeholders until June 21 for feedback, even as rollout is set for July 1. Unions wonder if these inputs will be considered at all if the decision has already been made.

Power dynamics

Arguing that the changes could reshape wage dynamics across labour markets, Rajendran Narayanan from NREGA Sangharsh Morcha said the MGNREGA created a wage floor below which private employers found it harder to push workers. "Employment under the scheme is restricted or suspended, large numbers of labourers are pushed into the private labour market at once, weakening bargaining power and benefiting large landowners and employers, while landless labourers and women workers lose out," he said.

He added that

the issue goes beyond workdays, as MGNREGA provided an alternative source of income and the ability to refuse exploitative wages, and reducing it inevitably shifts power back towards employers.

Capped employment

Notably, while the new Act increases the workdays, it also caps the total amount of work that can be generated. Unlike MGNREGA, where work expanded with demand, the new framework ties jobs to a fixed annual "normative" allocation for each State. Once this central cap is exhausted, additional demand is not met unless States fund it, turning an open-ended entitlement into a budget-restricted system.

Split the bill

The scheme is also structured on a 60:40 funding model, with States expected to contribute 40% of the cost, unlike MGNREGA where wage payments were fully funded by the Centre.

Workers argue that similar Centre-State cost-sharing patterns, as seen among ASHA and Anganwadi workers, often lead to delays in wage payments when either side of funding is disrupted. Even under MGNREGA, they argue, wage revisions over time did not keep pace with inflation.

The funding model has also drawn criticism from the Karnataka government, which has argued that States are already under fiscal stress and cannot shoulder the burden of contributing 40% of the funds.

The Union government on June 9 released the interim budget for VB-G RAM G. Karnataka has been allocated ₹5,709.9 crore under the Act. Announcing the release, Union Rural Development Minister Sitvraj Singh Chouhan said that Karnataka, along with Jharkhand, Telangana and Mizoram, is yet to complete all procedural formalities. The total allocation for States under the interim budget stands at ₹92,550.17 crore.

Not perfect

Workers' unions acknowledged that MGNREGA was not perfect, citing delayed fund releases, wage payment backlogs and excessive digitisation as recurring post-COVID concerns, and acknowledging that even the legal guarantee of 100 days was rarely met. While households were entitled to 100 days of work, data shows average employment per household as close to 45 days.

In 2025-26, the average wage rate per person per day was ₹342, up from ₹282.2 in 2021-22, an increase of only ₹59 - which workers say does not reflect rising living costs.

However, workers like Chetana from Dharwad argued that if a demand-driven programme backed by a legal guarantee, open-ended funding commitments and full central support struggled to provide 100 days of employment, how can a scheme built on capped allocations, shared state funding and periodic work stoppages realistically deliver 125?

Right under question

"We are told work will be given only if a requirement is identified, approved and funded. If there is no approved project or the budget is exhausted, there is no work. That means it is no longer a guarantee, and the uncertainty decides whether we migrate," said Mahantesh, a worker from Kalabura

gi. He added that work under the Act will be identified by the Union government and if priorities lie elsewhere, workers will have to migrate for work. "How does someone sitting in Delhi know what is the need in Raichur or Belagavi or anywhere? How is that a right to work?" he contended.

Workers argue that the new Act is not a replacement for MGNREGA in any real sense. "Replacement means something better, beyond changing name. Something that reflects current realities and is framed after consulting the people it affects," said another worker Mahesh from Grammeena Kooli Karmikara Sangha (Grakoos), emphasising that for labourers, power lay in the gram panchayats - the first point of access for any household seeking work.

"Every December, a gram panchayat meeting would be held where we put forward our demands. Work was planned and implemented accordingly," said Gayathri Anappa from Hubballi. She added that the gram sabbha decided village works, with "the village's priorities" guiding planning. Under VB-G RAM G, however, access to work depends on central priorities, notified areas and approved schemes through Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans (VGPP).

Pause window

Another provision drawing criticism is the 60-day "Seasonal Alignment Window," under which State governments can suspend all VB-G RAM G works for up to 60 days a year during peak sowing and harvesting seasons. Workers are expected to return to the private labour market during this period, and since it is treated as an administrative pause, no unemployment allowance is payable.

Workers say this marks another shift from MGNREGA, where work could be demanded throughout the year. "Karnataka's uneven geography makes such a blanket pause problematic, as drought-prone north Karnataka depends far more heavily on the scheme than the south, and a uniform shutdown could hit the poorest regions hardest, leaving migration as the only option," argued Krishnappa, a worker from Koppal.

The provision around pause-window rests on the assumption that demand for work falls during monsoon months - a claim contested by workers. In Karnataka, 34.5 lakh people demanded work between June and August alone in 2025-26.

'Excessive digitisation'

Excessive digitisation has long been flagged as a problem under MGNREGA, with workers complaining that the National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS) used for attendance is often affected by poor connectivity, server failures and facial recognition errors, leaving workers marked absent despite completing work and losing wages.

They say a system meant to improve transparency has instead become a barrier to wages. Even the Parliamentary Standing Committee report in April 2025 had even recommended pausing NMMS until glitches were fixed and strengthening offline systems, noting that technology should enable access to work, not block it.

Workers argue the new Act pushes further in the same direction. "Despite repeated complaints, VB-G RAM G relies even more on digital and biometric systems for attendance, payments and monitoring," said Raja K., another worker, adding there is still no clarity from the Centre or State on implementation. "If workers can lose wages because a photo fails to upload or a server crashes, what happens when the system becomes even more dependent on technology?" he asked.

