



The unkindest cut

Posted at: 03/04/2019

Reducing funds for MGNREGS has caused disenchantment among two groups which are politically powerful

- To do well in this general election, the BJP must overcome several serious obstacles of its own making.
- Among its failures, a misjudgment that has attracted less attention is the reduction in funds for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).
- It has caused disenchantment among two different groups, both of which are politically powerful.
- First, it has hit poor villagers who are in dire need of wages from the programme.
- MGNREGS began to address the problem of malnutrition and stunting in India, which cause irreparable damage to the bodies and minds of children.
- Many MGNREGS workers have used their earnings to improve small plots of land or to buy livestock.
- This modestly but crucially enhanced their assets and autonomy.
- In recent years, most of the labour on MGNREGS work sites has been done by women, who gain greater independence in their households from their earnings that reach their bank accounts.
- The MGNREGS has also provided benefits to Dalits and Adivasis.
- When he was Rural Development Minister, Birendra Singh opposed the constriction of funding for the Scheme because demand for employment on work sites remained strong.
- The Centre has also been slow in sanctioning funds for State governments, adding to the serious decline in work opportunities.
- The funding cuts have alienated elected members of India's gram panchayats, many of whom have real political clout at the grass-roots level.
- By law, at least half of MGNREGS funds must go to gram panchayats,

and some State governments provide as much as 90%.

The Hindu



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