

CIWP

CURRENT ISSUES WRITING PRACTICE

POST-TEST MATERIAL FOR CIWP – C

Q1. Food security exists when all people at all time have physical and economic access to sufficient food. In the light of the statement, discuss the need for ‘One Nation One Ration Card’. What are the challenges in its implementation? (200 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Food security exists when all people at all time have physical and economic access to sufficient food. National Food Security Act, 2013 ensured the economic access to food. However, physical access still remained a hurdle as a large chunk of India's poor population are migrant workers. The recently launched One Nation One Ration Card system aims to fill this gap in food security.

One National One Ration Card

- The One Nation One Ration Card system filled the gap of physical access in food security by ensuring the delivery of food security entitlements irrespective of the physical location of the beneficiary.
- Under this system, eligible beneficiaries would be able to avail their entitled food grains under the National Food Security Act from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) in the country using the same ration card.

Need for ‘One Nation One Ration Card’(ONORC)

- Since ration cards are issued by state governments, this implied that beneficiaries could procure food grains only from the designated ration shops within the concerned state.
- If a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state. There were other complications. For instance, after marriage, a woman needed to get her name removed from the ration card issued to her parents, and get it added to the ration card issued to her husband's family. The ONORC scheme attempts to address this gap in TPDS delivery.
- Essentially, the scheme has been launched keeping in mind the internal migration of our country, since people keep moving to different states in search of better job opportunities and higher standards of living.

Challenges in implementation of ONORC

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- First, the fiscal implications: ON-ORC will affect how the financial burden is shared between states.
- Second, the larger issues of federalism and inter-state coordination: Many states are not convinced about a “one size fits all” regime because they have customised the PDS through higher subsidies, higher entitlement limits, and supply of additional items.
- Third, the technology aspect: ON-ORC requires a complex technology backbone that brings over 750 million beneficiaries, 5,33,000 ration shops and 54 million tonnes of food-grain annually on a single platform.

Way forward

These barriers might seem daunting, but the country has previously dealt with an equally complex situation while rolling out the GST, which was widely touted as “one nation, one tax”.

- The Centre could provide an assurance to “net inbound migration” states such as Maharashtra and Kerala that any additional costs on account of migrants will be covered by it for the five year.
- The government could consider a national council for ON-ORC similar to GST Council. To be effective, this council should meet regularly, have specific decision-making authority, and should operate in a problem-solving mode based on consensus building.
- The Nilekani-led task force recommended setting up of a PDS network (PDSN) to track movement of rations, register beneficiaries, issue ration cards, handle grievances and generate analytics. Since food rations are a crucial lifeline for millions, such a platform should incorporate principles such as inclusion, privacy, security, transparency, and accountability.
- ON-ORC should create, publish and adhere to time-bound processes, like right to public services legislation, and rapid grievance redress mechanism

Conclusion

If done well, ON-ORC could lay the foundation of a truly national and portable benefits system that includes other welfare programmes like LPG subsidy and social pensions. It is an opportunity to provide a reliable social protection backbone to migrants, who are the backbone of our economy.

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Q2. Migrant labourers deserve a fair share in the developmental accomplishments of the country. Comment in the backdrop of post-Covid-19 developments. (200 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Images of stranded migrants and their long arduous journeys back home will remain seared in our collective memories of the covid-19 pandemic in India. The current lockdown showed how governments in Maharashtra and Delhi failed to provide even food to them, let alone other facilities like shelter. Bihar didn't accept the migrants back during the lockdown and the governments of Delhi and Maharashtra were not able to feed them.

Size and importance of migrant workforce

They are said to account for 20 per cent of the total workforce — this puts their number anywhere between 100 million and 140 million — and are said to be responsible for 10 per cent of GDP.

Why migrant labourers are ignored by state governments?

Most governments don't care about them because they are not the voters in the places they live. They are voters in their native towns and villages but unfortunately, most are unable to travel to their villages during elections because that would mean loss of pay.

Problems faced by migrant labourers

- Living and working conditions of migrant workers often fall well below the standards and there is little political commitment to improving them.
- Formal contracts are non-existent and working and living conditions are determined by contractors rather than the welfare state.
- They are paid less and are denied formal contracts even though they work harder and put in longer hours.
- They are not given gratuity or medical benefits and are not entitled to any leave with pay.
- When at work, they do not have adequate occupational safety and out of work, they lack a social safety net.
- They lack political support as they are disenfranchised (they rarely get an opportunity to cast their vote).
- The local population hates them as they are seen as job-stealers.

Steps taken by government for migrant workers during Covid pandemic

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- The government acknowledged the significance of the MGNREGS in providing jobs to returning workers in rural areas. The Centre advised States/Union Territories to provide work through the scheme and to extend this to the monsoon season as well in providing jobs in plantations, horticulture, livestock-related work.
- The government announced a free supply of 5 kg of food grain per person and 1 kg channa per family per month for two months, for those migrants who are neither beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act (2013), or NFSA, nor possess State cards.
- The Centre launched the One Nation One Ration Card scheme to allow migrant workers to access food in States other than that of their permanent residence.
- It has also announced to launch a scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) to convert government funded housing in the cities into affordable rental housing complexes under PPP mode through a concessionaire.
- A special credit facility with liquidity of up to ₹5,000 crore has been announced for street vendors through a special scheme that will facilitate easy credit.

Way forward

- The attitude of all stakeholders towards the migrants must change. It is the job of the state and central governments, the district administration and the local self-government bodies to recognise the existence and dignity of migrant labourers.
- The local administrations must register all the new and old migrants living in their cities. The states must maintain a register of all migrant labourers. They must ask all migrant labourers coming from any part of India to first enrol themselves with the local municipality. This will allow the workers to seek help in the times of crisis.
- The governments must look at the migrant labourers as their responsibility. Since they are primarily serving the interests of the state, their well-being is the responsibility of the state governments.
- The central and state governments must jointly think about the migrants' housing problem. They must get a house, or a community-living facility should be provided to them on a rental basis from the government. Or it should be made mandatory for companies who hire these workers to give them temporary accommodation while the work is underway.

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Conclusion

The migrant are constitutionally legal citizens of India. Dignity is their fundamental right.

Q3. Critically analyse the interface between the constitutional provisions and laws of India with the social media platforms acting as arbiters of Truth. (200 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

In the midst of the massive protests that have erupted in the U.S. following the death of an African-American man in police custody, social media platform Twitter called out some of President Donald Trump's tweets as incorrect information and as against its policies. However, another social media giant, Facebook, stated that it did not want to take similar action since it did not want to be 'arbiters of truth'.

Interface between the constitutional provisions and laws of India

The controversy surrounding President Donald Trump's executive order that takes away the immunity enjoyed by social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter in the US puts the spotlight back on India's social media regulations.

- Indian courts have repeatedly held freedom of speech on a very high pedestal but the freedom comes with reasonable restrictions. Freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1) of the Constitution goes hand-in-hand with reasonable restrictions that may be imposed under Article 19(2).
- In India section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, provides the necessary shield to the intermediaries—social media platforms in this case—against liabilities arising from any third-party information made available by them on their platform. However, section 79 while being a "safe harbour" provision is not an unconditional immunity.
- Thus, constitutional provisions for free speech and expression need to be used in tandem with other legal provisions related to publisher accountability, instead of skewing the balance in favour of one over the other.

Way forward

- Social media's reach is much wider than the traditional media's. So it is necessary that social media platforms should be treated on par or subject to a higher standard of care and accountability as compared to traditional media organizations.

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- Fact-checking mechanisms may need to be put in place before the platforms allow publication of content and therefore the consequent liability will need to be placed.
- If we try to introduce a government into the picture, it is going to be mostly political censorship. It is also going to start a process of self-censoring, because there is fear. Therefore supervised self-regulation can be employed such as Facebook's Oversight Board.
- It would be beneficial for India to look at the regulation standards implemented by different countries in order to introduce guidelines which form a balance between freedom of speech and accountability of social media platforms.

Conclusion

Freedom of speech and expression is also coupled with duty of responsibility and accountability.