

CURRENT AFFAIRS

16 September 2022

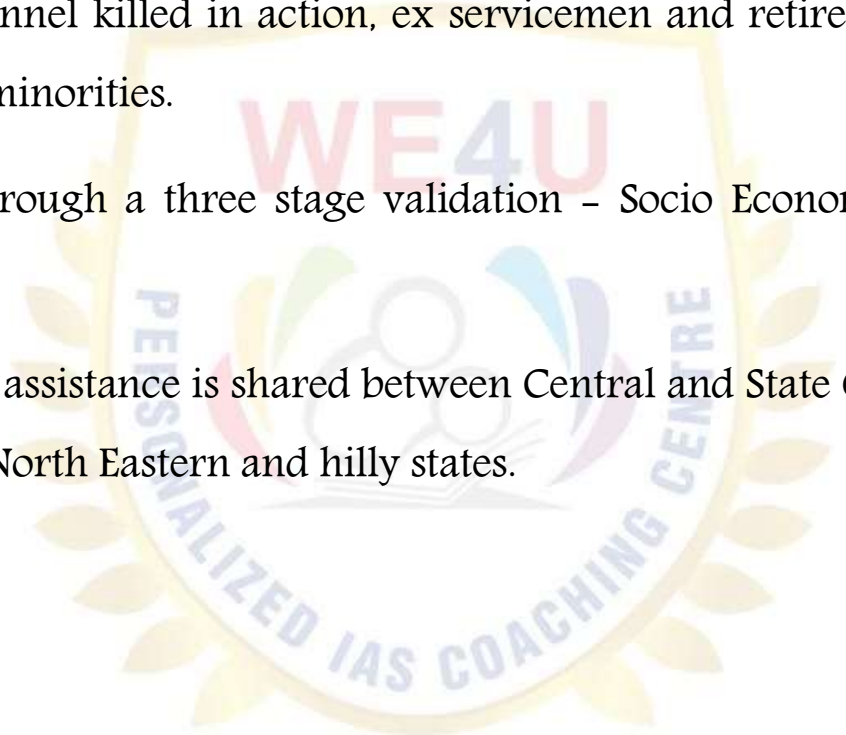


TOPIC: WELFARE SCHEMES

Delay in govt.'s flagship PMAY-G scheme to invite penalty

PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA GRAMIN

- ✓ To achieve the objective of “Housing for All” by 2022, the erstwhile rural housing scheme Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) was restructured to Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana–Gramin (PMAY–G) w.e.f 1st April, 2016.
- ✓ Ministry of Rural development.
- ✓ To provide a pucca house with basic amenities to all rural families, who are homeless or living in kutcha or dilapidated houses by the end of March 2022.
- ✓ To help rural people Below the Poverty Line (BPL) in construction of dwelling units and upgradation of existing unserviceable kutcha houses by providing assistance in the form of a full grant.

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- ✓ **Beneficiaries:** People belonging to SCs/STs, freed bonded labourers and non-SC/ST categories, widows or next-of-kin of defence personnel killed in action, ex servicemen and retired members of the paramilitary forces, disabled persons and minorities.
 - ✓ **Selection of Beneficiaries:** Through a three stage validation – Socio Economic Caste Census 2011, Gram Sabha, and geo-tagging.
 - ✓ **Cost Sharing:** The cost of unit assistance is shared between Central and State Governments in the ratio 60:40 in plain areas and 90:10 for North Eastern and hilly states.

TOPIC: WELFARE SCHEMES

EXPLAINER

Tamil Nadu's new breakfast scheme in schools

How has the history of the idea of nutrition in school schemes progressed so far?

T. RAMAKRISHNAN

The story so far: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin on Thursday, at the Madurai Corporation Primary School Aathimoolam II in Simmakal, Madurai, launched the **Chief Minister's Breakfast Scheme for students of Class I to V in government schools**. The scheme covers around 1.14 lakh students in 1,545 schools which include 417 municipal corporation schools, 163 municipality schools and 728 taluk and village panchayat-level schools. A sum of ₹33.56 crore has been set apart for the scheme. The inauguration of the scheme marks an important milestone in the State's history of providing free meals to school students.

How has the idea evolved?

In November 1920, the Madras (now Chennai) Corporation Council approved a proposal for providing tiffin to the students of a Corporation School at **Thousand Lights** at a cost not exceeding one anna per student per day. P. Theagaraya Chetty, the then President of the Corporation (the modern-day equivalent of Mayor) and one of the stalwarts of the Justice Party, said the boys studying at the school were poor, which affected the strength of the institution 'greatly'. The scheme, which

was extended to four more schools and facilitated higher enrollment of students, suffered a setback in 1925 when the British government disallowed the expenditure on the supply of mid-day meals to students from the Elementary Education Fund. It was revived two years later, benefitting around 1,000 poor students in 25 schools.

The concept saw a **State-wide application in 1956 when the then Chief Minister K. Kamaraj decided to provide free noon meal to poor children in all primary schools across the State**. The Budget for 1956-57 contained a provision for supplying mid-day meals to schoolchildren for 200 days a year, initially covering 65,000 students in 1,300 feeding centres.

In July 1982, it was left to the then **Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran to extend the programme to children in the 2-5 age group in Anganwadis and those in 5-9 age group in primary schools in rural areas**. Subsequently, the scheme – **now called Puratchi Thalaivar M.G.R. Nutritious Meal Programme** – was extended to urban areas as well. Since September 1984, students of standards VI to X have been covered under the scheme.

Over the years, there have been improvements to the programme. M.



The inauguration of the Chief Minister's Breakfast Scheme. ■ ASHOK. R

Karunanidhi, as Chief Minister during the short-lived Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Ministry (1989-91), introduced the provision of boiled eggs once every fortnight, starting June 1989. His successor, Jayalalithaa, in March 2013, extended the scheme by including variety meals along with masala eggs as per the children's choice.

What are the number of beneficiaries of the programme? As of now, there are nearly 46.7 lakh

beneficiaries spread over 43,190 nutritious meal centres. This includes around 3,500 students of National Child Labour Project (NCLP) special schools. The State budget for 2022-23 has provided around ₹2,077 crore for the nutritious meal programme.

Besides, as a consequence of the collaborative implementation of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and the nutritious meal programme, around 15.8 lakh children in the age group of 2+ to 5+ years receive nutritious meals.

What was the impact of the mid-day meal scheme on school education?

After the improved version of the mid-day meal scheme in 1982, the **Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) at primary level (standards I to V) went up by 10% during July-September, 1982 as compared to the corresponding period in 1981**.

The rise in boys' enrollment was 12% and in the case of girls, 7%, according to a publication brought out by the Tamil Nadu government on the occasion of the launch of the Chief Minister's Breakfast Scheme.

Likewise, attendance during July-September 1982 rose by 33% over the previous year's figure.

Kamaraj - An Era (2008), a biography

authored by senior Congress functionary A. Gopanna, states that after the inauguration of the mid-day meal scheme in 1956, the number of primary schools went up from 15,800 in 1957 to 29,000 in 1962.

Where should the programme focus more?

Anaemia is a major health problem in Tamil Nadu, especially among women and children, says the 2019-21 National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5's report. From 50% during the period of the 2015-16 NFHS-4, the prevalence of anaemia in children now went up to 57%. This and many other health issues can be addressed through the combined efforts of the departments of School Education, Public Health and Social Welfare and Women Empowerment.

Based on expert advice, those in charge of the implementation of the ICDS and the nutritious meal programme can enhance the component of nutrition to those children having specific problems. The latest Breakfast Scheme is a step in this direction.

Besides, a continuous and rigorous review of the progress of the scheme and nutritious meal programme should be carried out in a sustained manner, says a senior government official.

THE GIST

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TOPIC: PLACE IN NEWS

Restored Qutb Shahi tombs will make case for Heritage City: KTR

The wells inside the tomb complex date back to the 15th century

SERISH NANISSETTI
HYDERABAD

Connecting the Golconda Fort with the restored Qutb Shahi tombs is expected to turn the complex into a tourism hub, K.T. Rama Rao, Telangana Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development has said. At present, people have to take a detour to visit these two places.

Dedicating the six restored wells inside the Qutb Shahi Tombs Complex in Hyderabad on Thursday, the Minister said the restored site will help make a strong



Minister K.T. Rama Rao with Consul General of the U.S. Consulate in Hyderabad, Jennifer Larson. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

case for UNESCO World Heritage City. The restored medieval wells include the 16.5 metre deep (about five storeys) 3.5 million litre capacity 'Badi Baoli' and an equally massive step-well near Jamshed Quli's tomb as well as the 4.7 million litre capac-

ity 'Hammam Baoli'. Mr. Rao said that the government is also planning to restore Jilau Khana near the Laad Bazaar.

The Qutb Shahi tombs complex dating back to 15th century has numerous tombs, funerary mosques, wells and gardens.

Golconda Fort

- ✓ It is located in the western part of Hyderabad city.
- ✓ It was originally known as Mankal, and built on a hilltop in the year 1143.
- ✓ It was originally a mud fort under the reign of Rajah of Warangal.
- ✓ Later it was fortified between 14th and 17th centuries by the Bahmani Sultans and then by the Qutub Shahi dynasty. Golconda was the principal capital of the Qutub Shahi kings.

Qutb Shahi Tombs

- ✓ Lying two kilometers from the Golconda Fort, the Qutb Shahi Tombs are built in Persian, Hindu and Pathani styles of architecture.
- ✓ The tombs were planned and built by numerous monarchs who ruled the state during the 18th century.
- ✓ One of the most impressive tombs belongs to the founder of Hyderabad, Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah which rises to a height of 42 meters.

TOPIC: PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary business and an essential pit stop

Referring Bills to the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committees does help the process of lawmaking



DESH DEEPAK VERMA

It was heartening to have the recently concluded monsoon session of Parliament (July-August), even though it was adjourned sine die on August 8, 2022, witnessing the Competition (Amendment) Bill, 2022 and the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2022 being sent to the Standing Committee of Parliament for detailed examination and a report thereon.

This is a significant step in light of the fact that Parliament had only limited legislative time this session and could pass only five pieces of legislation. This has also come in the wake of constant criticism by the Opposition that has been alleging that the Government has been trying to steamroll various pieces of legislation in the last few sessions. The worry of the Government has been that so much time is lost in disruptions in Parliament that the legislative process, as it is, becomes unduly delayed and therefore, referring the bills to the Standing Committees may be counterproductive – that could only add to this delay.

Relevant parliamentary data
The functioning of the monsoon session of Parliament this year bears testimony to this fact: the Lok Sabha's productivity was 47% and the Rajya Sabha only 42%. It may be mentioned here that Parliament has 24 Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committees (DRSC), comprising members of the Parliament of both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha in the ratio 2:1, which are duly constituted by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Chairman

of the Rajya Sabha, jointly.

The mandate of these committees is to examine various legislations referred to it, the budget proposals of different Ministries, and also to do policy thinking on the vision, mission and future direction of the Ministries concerned. The objective of this article is to examine whether these committees have been able to achieve their stated objectives, and if not or if done inadequately, what the corrective actions could be to increase their efficacy and their relevance.

The percentage of Bills having been referred to the DRSCs during the tenures of the 14th (2004-2009), 15th (2009-2014) and 16th Lok Sabhas (2014-2019) has been 60%, 71% and 27%, respectively. The fall in this percentage during the 16th Lok Sabha was witnessed largely in the second half of its session, when the Government was in a hurry to push its big ticket reforms through and the Opposition was equally adamant to stall it in view of high stakes involved in the 2019 elections.

Committee versus Parliament
Even though it is not obligatory for the Government to agree to refer each Bill to the DRSC, the experience, both nationally and internationally, has been that referring a Bill to the DRSC has been of use to the process of lawmaking. It has been alleged that Bills which are not being referred to the parliamentary committees, are not examined properly, especially from the perspective of consumers and stakeholders and remain just a bureaucratically conceived piece of legislation. As proof of this, the case of the three Farm Bills is cited as they were passed without being referred to the DRSC and had to be withdrawn later.

Even though there could be many reasons for the withdrawal of the three Farm Bills – some of it political – it needs to be under-



V.K. KRISHNAN

stood that the examination of the Bills by the parliamentary committees is more to the benefit of the Government than the Opposition. The simple reason for this is that the tenor and the ambience of the discussions in the parliamentary committee and in Parliament are two entirely different things. The committee meetings are in camera and, therefore, the meetings are held in a comparatively congenial atmosphere of bonhomie and cordiality than they would be in Parliament.

The deliberations in these committees mostly add value to the content of the legislation and, more often than not, the Members, their party positions notwithstanding, try to reach a consensus. Additionally, such pieces of legislation after examination in the committees, have some sort of ownership of the members of the committee, both from the ruling side and the Opposition, even though it is also a function of the skill of the chairman of the committee.

Governments and the ruling party should not be wary of these committees, as in most of these committees, the government has a majority and the final decision is always by the process of majority voting. Therefore, there is no reason why any government should shy away from referring Bills to the committee. Skilled and experienced Ministers know this and generally have no aversion to a Bill being referred to the commit-

tees. So, fostering the trust of parliamentarians, both from the ruling party and the Opposition parties, in the relevance and usefulness of the system of the committees is of paramount importance.

Consider these steps

It has been observed that the reluctance to refer the Bills to the committee arises more out of inaction and ignorance of the Ministry concerned, and rarely out of ideological or policy reasons. So, the following changes could be suggested to be made into procedures meant for consideration of Bills.

First, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha have powers to refer Bills to a DRSC of Parliament. This requirement is often given a go by for various political or administrative reasons. It may be useful to make the process of reference of Bills to these committees compulsory/an automatic process. An exemption could be made with the specific approval of the Speaker/Chairman after detailed reasons for the same. The prerogative of the House to refer the Bills to the Standing committee, through an amendment, would, of course, remain unaffected.

Second, all discussions in the Parliamentary Standing Committee should be frank and free. For this, it may be provided that during the discussions of the committee meetings, no whip of the party would apply to them. In any case, they have the liberty to vote in favour or against the Bill in Parliament.

Third, the committees can be given a fixed timeline to come up with the recommendation and present its report which can be decided by the Speaker/Chairman. The committees mostly abide by this direction of the Speaker/Chairman. But to deal with just political exigencies, it can be provided that in case the committee

fails to give its recommendation within the approved/extended time, the Bill may be put up before the House concerned directly.

Fourth, to ensure quality work in the committees, experts in the field may be invited who could bring with them the necessary domain knowledge and also help introduce the latest developments and trends in that field from worldwide. It would be value for money if some subject matter experts/young researchers could be associated with the committee for a short period.

Fifth, the Speaker/Chairman should have the right to fix a time limit, sometimes even stringent, if the government of the day asks for it and the demand is found to be reasonable by the Speaker/Chairman.

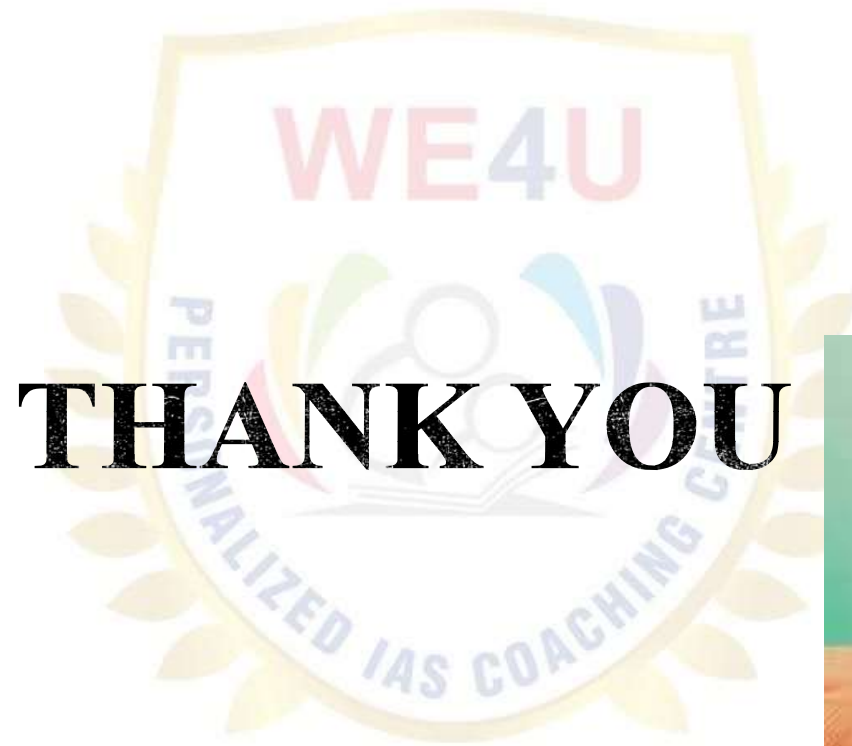
Sixth, between two sessions, there is generally enough time to organise committee meetings for discussions on Bills in the parliamentary committees. Sometimes, the government and the committee chairmen are lax in this respect, and then try to push through these pieces of legislation when the next session is announced. Hence, it is important for the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs to keep an eye on this and, in collaboration with the committee chairmen, get these parliamentary works organised during the inter-session period, in advance.

Seventh and last, when it comes to the budget proposals of the Ministries, the committees should not limit themselves to discussing just the budget proposals and endorsing them with a few qualifications here or amendments there. They should also come up with suggestions for the Ministry to take up new initiatives and people-friendly measures.

Desh Deepak Verma is a former Indian Administrative Service officer and a former Secretary-General of the Rajya Sabha

Standing Committee

- ✓ The 24 standing committees cover under their jurisdiction all the ministries/ departments of the Central Government.
- ✓ Each standing committee consists of 31 members (21 from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha). The members of the Lok Sabha are nominated by the Speaker from amongst its own members, just as the members of the Rajya Sabha are nominated by the Chairman from amongst its members.
- ✓ A minister is not eligible to be nominated as a member of any of the standing committees. In case a member, after his nomination to any of the standing committees, is appointed a minister, he then ceases to be a member of the committee.
- ✓ The term of office of each standing committee is one year from the date of its constitution



THANK YOU

