



National Commission for Safai Karamcharis

For Prelims: NCSK, Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

For Mains: Significance of NCSK in uplifting Lives of Manual Scavengers.

Why in News

The Union Cabinet has approved the **extension of the tenure of the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) for three years beyond 31st March, 2022.**

- The major beneficiaries would be the Safai Karamcharis and identified manual scavengers in the country.
- **Manual scavenging** is defined as “the removal of human excrement from public streets and dry latrines, cleaning septic tanks, gutters and sewers”.

Key Points

- **About:**
 - The NCSK was established in the year 1993 as per the provisions of the **NCSK Act 1993** to give its recommendations to the Government regarding specific programmes for welfare of Safai Karamcharis.
 - The NCSK Act ceased to have effect from 29th February, 2004. After that the **tenure of the NCSK has been extended as a non-statutory body** from time to time through resolutions.
 - It studies and evaluates the existing welfare programmes for Safai Karamcharis, investigates cases of specific grievances etc.
 - As per the provisions of the **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**, the NCSK has been assigned the work to monitor the implementation of the Act, tender advice for its effective implementation to the Center and State Governments and enquire into complaints regarding contravention/non-implementation of the provisions of the Act.
 - The Chairperson and Members of the Commission undertake extensive touring of the country to study the socio-economic and living conditions of Safai Karamcharis and their dependents.
 - The Commission calls for the factual reports in connection with these complaints/petitions from the concerned authorities and impress upon them to redress the grievances of the affected Safai Karamcharis.
- **Status:**
 - As per the **NCSK** (2020 data), **a total of 631 people have died** in the country while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the last 10 years.
 - **2019 saw the highest number of manual scavenging deaths** in the past five years. 110 workers were killed while cleaning sewers and septic tanks.
 - This is a 61% increase as compared to 2018, which saw 68 cases of such similar deaths.

- As per data collected in **2018, 29,923 people were engaged in manual scavenging in Uttar Pradesh**, making it the highest in any State in India.
- **Related Schemes:**
 - **Prevention of Atrocities Act:**
 - In 1989, the Prevention of **Atrocities Act** became an integrated guard for sanitation workers; more than 90% people employed as manual scavengers belonged to the Scheduled Caste. This became an important landmark to free manual scavengers from designated traditional occupations.
 - **Safaimitra Suraksha Challenge:**
 - It was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on **World Toilet Day (19th November)** in 2020.
 - The Government launched this “challenge” for all states to make sewer-cleaning mechanized by April 2021 — if any human needs to enter a sewer line in case of unavoidable emergency, proper gear and oxygen tanks, etc., are to be provided.
 - **‘Swachhta Abhiyan App’:**
 - It has been developed to identify and geotag the data of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers so that the insanitary latrines can be replaced with sanitary latrines and rehabilitate all the manual scavengers to provide dignity of life to them.
 - **National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation:**
 - It is a not-for-profit company under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
 - The primary objective of this corporation is **to uplift the Safai Karamcharis, Scavengers and their dependents socially and economically.**
 - **SC Judgment:**
 - In 2014, a **Supreme Court** order made it mandatory for the government to identify all those who died in sewage work since 1993 and provide Rs. 10 lakh each as compensation to their families.

Prohibition of Employment of Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013

- The Act **prohibits employment of manual scavengers, manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks without protective equipment**, and the construction of insanitary latrines.
- No person, local authority or agency (like Municipal Corporations) should engage or employ people for hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks. Mechanized cleaning of septic tanks is the prescribed norm.
- It seeks to **rehabilitate manual scavengers and provide for their alternative employment.** Each local authority, cantonment board, and railway authority is responsible for surveying insanitary latrines within its jurisdiction. They shall also construct a number of sanitary community latrines.
- Each occupier of insanitary latrines **shall be responsible for converting or demolishing the latrine** at his own cost. If he fails to do so, the local authority shall convert the latrine and recover the cost from him.
- The **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (Amendment) Bill, 2020** has been introduced.

Source: PIB