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A promise to end manual scavenging in Union Budget 2023-24

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Why is in news? Coming in with a nearly ₹100 crore allocation in this year's Budget for the newly christened NAMASTE (National Action Plan for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem) scheme, Finance Minister said that the Union government is looking to enable 100% mechanical desludging of septic tanks and sewers in all cities and towns.

About manual scavenging

Manual scavenging is the practice of removing human excreta by hand from sewers or septic tanks.

The direct handling of human excreta by sanitation workers has been banned since 1993 under the Employment of Manual Scavenging and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, which also prohibited the construction and maintenance of dry latrines.

Since December 6, 2013, manual scavenging has been banned under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013

The Act bans the use of any individual for manually cleaning, carrying, disposing of or otherwise handling in any manner, human excreta till its disposal.

In 2013, the definition of manual scavengers was also broadened to include people employed to clean septic tanks, ditches, or railway tracks.

The Act recognizes manual scavenging as a "dehumanizing practice," and cites a need to "correct the historical injustice and indignity suffered by the manual scavengers."

Reason for prevalence of Manual Scavenging in India

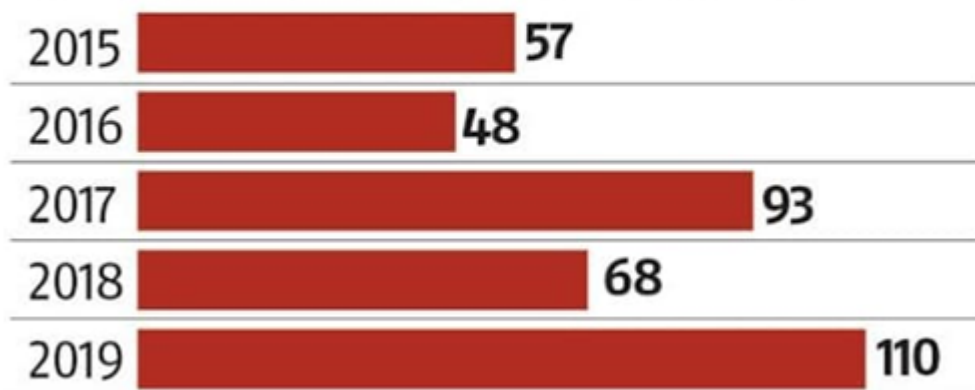
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DEATHS WHILE CLEANING SEWERS AND SEPTIC TANKS



In India, despite laws banning manual scavenging, a practice of removing human excreta by hand from sewers or septic tanks, it continues unabated.

As many as 330 people died while undertaking “hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks” from 2017-22, Minister of State for Social Justice and informed the Lok Sabha in August 2022.

The root cause of manual scavenging is caste and stigma. Since everyone finds it more economical to employ workers who are paid exploitative wages, India lacks proper machinery.

The lack of enforcement of the Act and exploitation of unskilled labourers are the reasons why the practice is still prevalent in India.

The [Mumbai](#) civic body charges anywhere between Rs 20,000 and Rs 30,000 to clean septic tanks. The unskilled labourers, meanwhile, are much cheaper to hire and contractors illegally employ them at a daily wage of Rs 300-500.

NAMASTE Scheme

Government has formulated a scheme “National Action Plan for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE)” which is a joint project of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

The NAMASTE scheme was launched last year, subsuming the already existing Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS), with Ministry officials saying that since manual scavenging (humans collecting human waste by hand) was no longer practised in India, the next goal was to eliminate hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.

The project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

Zero fatalities in sanitation work in India.

All sanitation work to be performed by skilled workers.

No sanitation workers should come in direct contact with human faecal matter.

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Sanitation workers are to be collectivized into SHGs and are empowered to run sanitation enterprises.

All Sewer and Septic tank sanitation workers (SSWs) have access to alternative livelihoods.

Strengthened supervisory and monitoring systems at national, state and ULB levels to ensure enforcement and monitoring of safe sanitation work.

Increased awareness amongst sanitation services seekers (individuals and institutions) to seek services from registered and skilled sanitation workers.

In addition, for safe and sustainable sanitation, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has issued the **Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) Policy, 2017** which emphasizes implementation of legal prohibition of manual scavenging under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 and have also prescribed the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for safe cleaning of sewer and septic tanks in November, 2018.

Official government data showed that the Ministry had identified 58,098 beneficiaries for the rehabilitation scheme for manual scavengers, all of whom had been handed out the one-time payment of ₹40,000 each by 2020.

As part of the NAMASTE scheme, the guidelines for which are close to being finalised, the Social Justice Ministry intends to first enumerate the number of people engaged in hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks across 500 AMRUT cities (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) and then proceed with its plans.

Being undertaken jointly by the Social Justice Ministry and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the government is expected to spend ₹360 crore over the next four years on the scheme.

In this year's Budget, the Social Justice Ministry has allocated ₹97.41 crore for the NAMASTE scheme, with no allocation for the SRMS programme