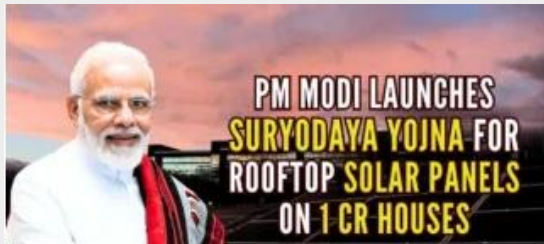


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1. Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana



Why in news?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced the 'Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana', a government scheme under which one crore households will get rooftop solar power systems.

Earlier scheme

This isn't the first scheme for promoting the installation of rooftop solar power systems, though. In 2014, the government launched the Rooftop Solar Programme that aimed to achieve a cumulative installed capacity of 40,000 megawatts (MW) or 40 gigawatts (GW) by 2022.

However, this target couldn't be achieved. As a result, the government extended the deadline from 2022 to 2026. The Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana seems to be a new attempt to help reach the target of 40 GW rooftop solar capacity.

What is the Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana?

Essentially, it is a scheme that will involve installing solar power systems at rooftops for residential consumers.

The scheme would help not only reduce electricity bills of the "poor and middle class", but also push India's goal of becoming self-reliant in the energy sector.

What is India's current solar capacity?

According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's website, solar power installed capacity in India has reached around 73.31 GW as of December 2023. Meanwhile, rooftop solar installed capacity is around 11.08 GW as of December 2023.

In terms of total solar capacity, Rajasthan is at the top with 18.7 GW. Gujarat is at the second position with 10.5 GW. When it comes to rooftop solar capacity, Gujarat tops the list with 2.8 GW, followed by Maharashtra by 1.7 GW.

Notably, solar power has a major share in the country's current renewable energy capacity, which stands at around 180 GW.

Why is an expansion of solar energy important for India?

India is expected to witness the largest energy demand growth of any country or region in the world over the next 30 years, according to the latest World Energy Outlook by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

To meet this demand, the country would need a reliable source of energy and it can't be just coal plants. Although India has doubled down on its coal production in recent years, it also aims to reach 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

Therefore, it is essential to expand solar power capacity — the country has increased it from less than 10 MW in 2010 to 70.10 GW in 2023, as mentioned before.

What is the Rooftop Solar Programme?

Launched in 2014, the scheme aims to expand India's rooftop solar installed capacity in the residential sector by providing Central Financial Assistance — the financial assistance to the eligible projects as per MNRE Guidelines — and incentives to DISCOMs (distribution companies).

The programme's goal is to increase rooftop solar installed capacity to 40 GW by March 2026 and it is currently in its second phase. Owing to the scheme, the country's rooftop solar has increased from 1.8 GW as of March 2019 to 10.4 GW as of November 2023.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express

2. Equal access to benefits for all SCs

Why in news?

The Union government has formed a high-level committee of secretaries, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, to evaluate and work out a method for the equitable distribution of benefits, schemes and initiatives to the most backward communities among the over 1,200 Scheduled Castes (SCs) across the country, that have been crowded out by relatively forward and dominant ones.

Why this committee and why now?

This committee's formation is the result of a meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired in December, 2023, weeks after promising to look into the demand for sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes as raised by the Madiga community in Telangana in the run-up to the Assembly elections there last year. The Madiga community constitutes at least 50% of the SC population in Telangana, where SCs comprise around 15% of the total population (2011 Census). For decades, the Madiga community has said that despite their numbers, they are crowded out of government benefits meant for SCs, including reservation, by the Mala community — another SC — which is dominant and relatively forward.

Like the Madiga community, SC communities in several States have said that they have been routinely crowded out of benefits meant for SCs by dominant and relatively forward communities in their category. Commissions formed by State and Union governments have also supported the argument that several SC communities often miss out on benefits. As a

result, multiple States like Punjab, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu have tried to bring in reservation laws at the State level in a bid to sub-categorise SCs and decide on a separate quantum of reservation for these subcategories within the umbrella of SCs— all of which are held up in courts.

Consequently, this high-level panel of Secretaries has been formed with a strict mandate to look into “other ways of taking care of their grievances”. While the committee’s formation comes on the heels of the PM’s promise to the Madiga community, sources have told that its “scope is larger than just one community in one State as it will be looking at ways to address similar issues faced by similarly-placed SC communities across the country”.

What will the panel do?

The Committee will consist of Secretaries from the Home Ministry, the Law Ministry, the Tribal Affairs Ministry, the Social Justice Ministry and the Department of Personnel and Training in addition to the Cabinet Secretary. With the question of breaking up the SC quota off the table, the panel will look into ways in which benefits of other government schemes and initiatives can be focused towards these SC communities. This includes ways to design special initiatives for communities that need it and focusing existing programmes and schemes towards them to ensure a more even distribution of benefits. While it has not been given a specific deadline, the committee has been asked to present its findings at the earliest.

The panel will have to figure out on what basis SC communities are going to be shortlisted for special attention, find out the extent to which special initiatives need to be designed for each of them, and then find a way to deliver them. While sources have indicated that the panel has been instructed not to veer off into the question of breaking up the SC quota, nothing prevents it from forming an opinion on this matter for the government’s consideration, if necessary.

Have there been attempts in the past?

The demand of the Madigas was raised as early as 1994, which led to the Union government seeking legal options to do the same in 2005. At the time, the erstwhile Attorney General of India had opined that the sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes was possible and that the Constitution could be amended to bring this about. But he had also stressed that this could happen only if there was “unimpeachable evidence to indicate a necessity” for it — suggesting that there needs to be a mechanism to gather empirical evidence to prove the necessity of sub-categorisation.

At the time, both the National Commissions for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and Scheduled Tribes (NCST) had opposed the move to amend the Constitution, arguing that just setting aside a quota within the quota would not be enough and that making sure existing schemes and benefits reach them on priority basis was more urgent. However, even the NCST and NCSC had in 2005 maintained that nothing in the Constitution’s Articles 341 and 342 explicitly prevented Parliament from sub-categorising SCs and STs.

These Articles vest the powers of notifying SC and ST lists with the President of India and of creating the lists with Parliament, with no specific instruction as to whether there can be sub-categorisation within these lists respectively. In fact, the Commissions had gone one step

ahead and argued that Article 16(4) of the Constitution of India already provided for States to create special provisions for any backward classes it felt was under-represented.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

3. Why was FCRA registration for several NGOs cancelled?



Why in news?

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, 2010 (FCRA) registration of two prominent non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and World Vision India (WVI) have been cancelled this month.

Who monitors the process?

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) monitors the implementation of the FCRA. The registration of thousands of NGOs was due for renewal in 2020-2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the amendments to the FCRA Act in 2020, many NGOs could not complete the process. The MHA had given a relief up to September 30, 2021 to NGOs whose registration was expiring between September 29, 2020 and September 30, 2021 to apply for a renewal. The MHA has extended the deadline multiple times; the latest date being March 31, 2024.

Through the FCRA, the ministry regulates foreign donations to ensure that such funds do not adversely affect the country's internal security. It is compulsory to register under the Act, first enacted in 1976, if an association, group or NGO intends to receive foreign donations. The 1976 Act was repealed and replaced with a new legislation in 2010. It was further amended in 2020. The registration is valid for five years, after which the NGO has to apply for a renewal. It is mandatory for all such NGOs to register under the FCRA, initially valid for five years that can be renewed if it complies with all norms. Registered groups can receive foreign contribution for social, educational, religious, economic and cultural programmes.

How many have lost registration?

Since 2015, the FCRA registration of more than 16,000 NGOs have been cancelled on account of "violation." As on January 22, there were 16,989 FCRA-registered NGOs active in the country. The FCRA registration of nearly 6,000 NGOs had ceased to operate from January 1, 2022 as the MHA either refused to renew their application or the NGOs did not apply.

Why were CPR and WVI's registrations cancelled?

The MHA alleged that CPR diverted foreign donations to fund "protests and legal battles against developmental projects" and misused funds to "affect India's economic interests." It alleged that the think tank engaged in production of current affairs programmes which violated FCRA norms. CPR had furnished a report on air pollution — "Overview on the Commission for Air Quality Management Act 2021, policy challenges for the new government etc." The MHA said publishing of current affairs programme using foreign funds is prohibited under Section 3 of the FCRA.

CPR said that the ministry's decision is incomprehensible and disproportionate, and some of the reasons given challenge the very basis of the functioning of a research institution. "This includes the publication on our website of policy reports emanating from our research being equated with current affairs programming," CPR said. The registration of WVI was cancelled for alleged FCRA violations from 2012-13 to 2020-21. WVI is the recipient of the highest amount of foreign donations among all NGOs registered under the Act in 1986.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu