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1. What does Karnataka Bill promise gig workers?

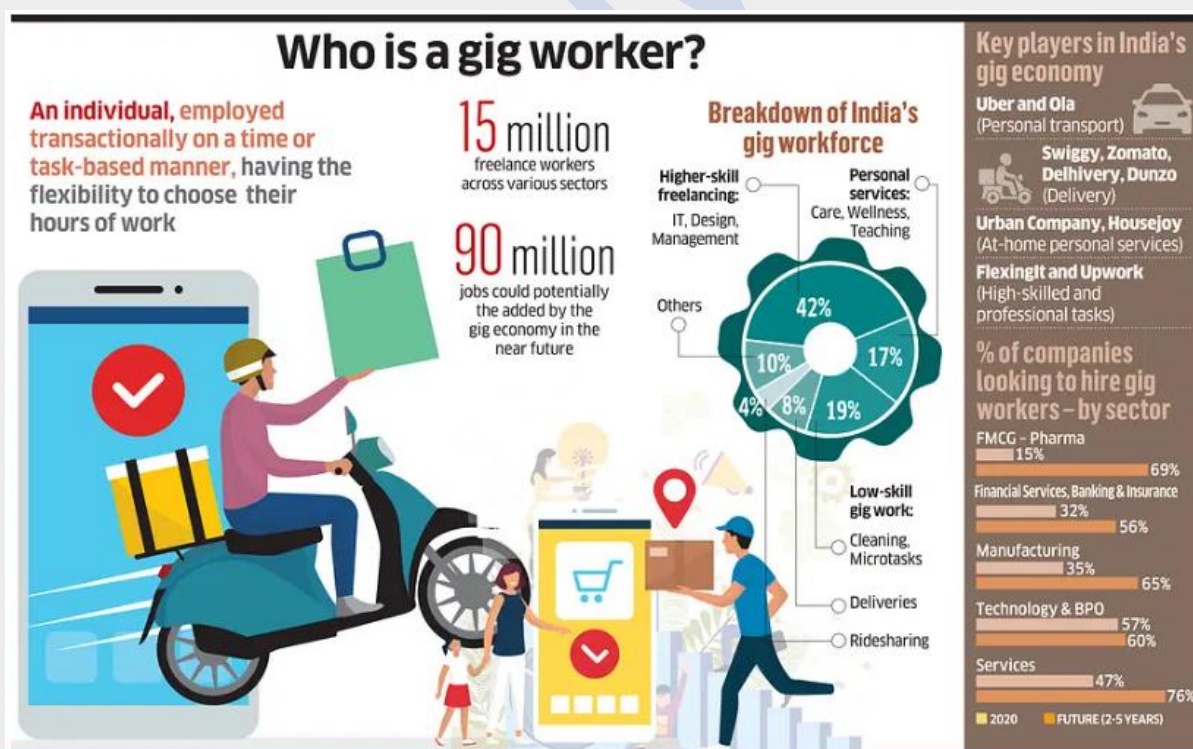
Why in News?

On June 29, the Karnataka government published the draft of the Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, making it the second Indian State to initiate such a move, the first being Rajasthan.

The Bill seeks to regulate the social security and welfare of platform-based gig workers in the State and is expected to be placed in the monsoon session of the Assembly.

What is a Gig Worker?

A gig worker is someone who takes on short-term or project-based jobs, rather than being employed by a company. Many freelancers find gigs through online platforms.



Unlike traditional employees, gig economy workers lack the security, perks, and employee benefits that come with being a full-time employee. For example, they usually have to provide

for their own health insurance, retirement plans, and other benefits that a traditional employee might get as part of their compensation package.

However, gig workers tend to enjoy more flexibility. They're considered independent workers who can pursue other jobs or side hustles based on their schedules and interests. Plus, many gig roles offer the luxury of working from any location.

Think of the ridesharing apps Uber and Ola, the food delivery app Swiggy, or Instacart for grocery delivery. For work that can be done remotely, such as graphic design or virtual assistant, businesses might look to a platform like Upwork, such as contracting a graphic designer to create a pamphlet or logo.

Many industries, including tech, education, and finance, now rely on gig work to fill labor gaps, reflecting its versatility and the growing demand for flexible work arrangements.

Gig workforce in India

A 2022 NITI Aayog report estimates that India will have 23.5 million gig workers by 2029-30. Around two lakh gig workers work with platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, Uber, Ola, Urban Company, Porter, Dunzo, Amazon, Flipkart and so on in Bengaluru alone reportedly. The last two decades have seen the rise of several such platforms shaping the gig economy in India and impacting the labour market in a big way.

Veering away from traditional employer-employee relationships, the aggregators do not onboard gig workers as their employees, but as 'partners' (or other similar terminologies). This essentially makes the workers independent contractors and leaves them outside the security net of labour protection laws. Although initially thought of as a great opportunity to make money while enjoying autonomy and flexibility, over the years workers started seeing reduced payments, arbitrary dismissals and other instances of exploitation in the absence of regulatory laws.

What are some of the highlights of the Bill?

Introduced as a 'rights-based bill', the Karnataka draft Bill seeks to protect the rights of platform-based gig workers and places obligations on aggregators in relation to social security, occupational health and safety of workers. The new draft aims to introduce safeguards against unfair dismissals, bring in a two-level grievance redressal mechanism for workers, and more transparency with regards to the automated monitoring and decision-making systems deployed by platforms.

According to the draft Bill, the contract between the aggregator and the worker should contain an exhaustive list of grounds on which the contract would be terminated by the aggregator. It also stipulates that the aggregator shall not terminate a worker without giving valid reasons in writing and prior notice of 14 days.

Why is this important?

Arbitrary terminations have been a major complaint raised by gig workers for many years now. Instances of blacklisting workers or terminating them from work without hearing out their side have been aplenty. Often, platforms enact these through automated monitoring and decision-

making systems which track the work and earnings of the gig worker, record customer feedback, and make decisions accordingly. Workers point out that this system is heavily skewed in favour of the customer and makes it a game of chasing ratings and pleasing the customer at any cost. The absence of human intervention leaves no room for grievance redressal for the latter.

What are the other features of the draft?

Given that arbitrary deductions from payments have been another point raised by workers, the draft mandates aggregators to make payments at least every week and to inform the worker about the reasons for payment deductions if any. As per the new draft, a worker will have the right to refuse a specified number of gigs per week with 'reasonable cause' without any adverse consequences.

Taking a leaf out of the Rajasthan Bill, the new draft also seeks to establish a welfare board and a social security and welfare fund for gig workers. A welfare fee would be levied either on every transaction between the worker and the aggregator or on the overall turnover of the company. The welfare fee as well as contributions from Union and State governments would go to the fund. All gig workers must be registered and the aggregators should furnish to the government the database of gig workers. Contracts must be written in a simple language and any change should be notified to the worker at least 14 days before the proposed change. The gig worker will have the option to terminate the contract accordingly without any adverse consequences for their existing entitlements. The aggregator must also provide reasonable and safe working conditions for workers, although the draft does not delve into what constitutes as 'reasonable.'

Have there been initiatives in other States?

Around a year back, Rajasthan introduced the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Bill, making it the first-ever State to do so. The Bill that was introduced by the Congress government became an Act in September. In November, the BJP came to power in the State and the Act has gone into cold storage. The Haryana government is set to establish a State-level board dedicated to the social and economic security of gig workers. The Telangana government is also currently in the process of drafting a similar bill as per sources.

As far as Union government initiatives are concerned, in 2020, the Code on Social Security was introduced. It recognised those who freelance or work under short terms, and mandated employers to provide them benefits similar to those of regular employees.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

2. Why Karnataka is cracking down on vendors of pani puri and gobi manchurian

Why in News?

Karnataka's food safety department has cracked down on sellers of many street food staples, such as gobi manchurian and pani puri.

The statewide crackdown is against the use of artificial food colouring, and other cancer-causing agents by food business operators (FBOs). In the past five months, 4,000 food samples have been collected for testing by the food safety department following reports of FBOs' unhygienic practices leading to health disorders.



Action after complaints

Srinivas K, Commissioner of Karnataka's Food Safety and Standards Commission, said they had received multiple complaints of vomiting, diarrhoea, and other health complications after consuming certain food items.

As a result, the department decided to take action against the use of artificial colouring agents. Since March, it has issued three orders banning the use of such agents in food items such as gobi manchurian, cotton candy, and chicken kababs.

The latest ban came earlier in July after the department found carcinogenic agents (they can potentially cause cancer) and bacteria harmful to human health in the samples of pani puri and shawarma.

Harmful colouring agents

The samples tested by the food safety department revealed that the food items contained artificial colouring agents such as Tartrazine, Sunset Yellow, Rhodamine B, and Brilliant Blue. These agents can cause cancer or lead to diabetes, kidney failure, and other complications, according to food safety department officials. In fact, Rhodamine B — used to give a red colour — is generally used as a synthetic dye to add colour to a wide range of materials such as textiles. Exposure to the dye may damage the eye and irritate the respiratory tract.

Legal action against FBOs

To take legal action against an FBO selling unsafe food items, the food safety department has to collect two kinds of samples — a survey sample and a legal sample. It first collects and tests a survey sample from an FBO. If this sample is found to be unsafe, four more samples (known as legal samples) are collected from the FBO concerned, and then sent to Central Food

Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) for further testing. If the CFTRI report also deems the sample unfit for human consumption, the FBO is booked under the Food Safety Act.

The FBO is tried at a court of Judicial Magistrate of First Class (JMFC). If the FBO is found guilty, a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh and imprisonment for seven years can be awarded. So far, 284 FOBs in Karnataka for selling unsafe food items under the Food Safety Act.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

3. PM Modi's first bilateral visit this term: Russia's importance for India

Why in News?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in Russia to meet President Vladimir Putin. The two leaders have met a total 16 times since Modi became Prime Minister, but not since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, provoking wide-ranging Western sanctions. Modi last went to Russia for the Eastern Economic Forum meeting in Vladivostok in September 2019; Putin last visited India in December 2021 for the annual bilateral summit.



Underlining a priority

In choosing Russia for his first bilateral visit after being sworn in, Modi has broken with the tradition of India's new Prime Minister travelling first to a neighbouring country, a template that he followed in both June 2014 (Bhutan) and June 2019 (Maldives and Sri Lanka). He travelled to Italy last month, but that was for a multilateral meeting of G7 leaders.

The visit to Russia is a statement of the importance New Delhi accords to its relationship with Moscow, and an underlining of this foreign policy priority. Modi will be meeting Putin around the same time as leaders of the 32 nations in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) gather in Washington DC from July 9-11 to celebrate 75 years of the anti-Russia military alliance.

Old age ties

India's relationship with Russia is seven decades old. Over the years, as India has diversified its relationships in a multi-polar world, the India-Russia relationship has stagnated in some areas and downgraded in others. Defence is the strongest pillar of the strategic partnership by far, with nuclear and space cooperation also occupying an important place.

Critical defence interest

The USSR was India's main supplier of defence equipment during the decades of the Cold War, and even now, between 60 and 70 per cent of India's defence equipment is estimated to be of Russian and Soviet origin. The defence cooperation has evolved over time from a buyer-seller framework to one involving joint R&D, co-development and joint production.

India and Russia have signed agreements for the supply of S-400 Triumf mobile surface-to-air missile systems, MiG-29 fighter aircraft, and Kamov helicopters, and for the licensed production of T-90 tanks, Su-30MKI fighters, AK-203 assault rifles, and BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles. The INS Vikramaditya, one of the Indian Navy's two aircraft carriers, is the former Soviet and Russia warship Admiral Gorshkov.

Over the last 25 years, India has sought to look beyond Russia — especially to the United States, France, and Israel for the supply of defence equipment. However, it still cannot afford to alienate Moscow, particularly at a time when Indian soldiers are in a standoff with the Chinese People's Liberation Army along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh. It is essential for India to have a regular and reliable supply of equipment and spares from Russia, and for Moscow to not share its sensitive defence technologies with Beijing.

War and oil boost to trade

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, India has been buying large amounts of Russian oil at a discount to cushion the inflationary impact of rising crude prices. In the face of international criticism, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar reiterated during his visit to Moscow in November 2022 that India would continue to buy Russian oil in the interest of Indian consumers.

The purchase of Russian crude has pushed bilateral trade volumes beyond expectations and targets. Before the war, the bilateral trade target was set at \$30 billion by 2025. However, bilateral trade reached an all-time high of \$65.70 billion in FY 2023-24, according to data from the Department of Commerce. The balance of trade was heavily in Russia's favour, and India's \$61.44 billion imports were made up mostly by Russian oil and petroleum products, fertilisers, mineral resources, precious stones and metals, and vegetable oils.

Walking diplomatic tightrope

The war has, however, put India in a delicate diplomatic position with its Western allies. New Delhi has walked the diplomatic tightrope, not explicitly condemning the Russian invasion but calling for an international probe into the Bucha massacre in the early weeks of the war, and expressing concern over threats of nuclear war issued by Russian leaders. India has abstained from voting against Russia in several resolutions at the United Nations Security Council.

On his November 2022 visit, Jaishankar had conveyed that India is on the side of "peace, respect for international law and support for the UN Charter", and "strongly advocates a return to dialogue and diplomacy".

Lines open to Moscow and Kyiv

There is a perception that India is positioning itself as a neutral player that could be a mediator between the two sides. Modi is one of the few world leaders who have had phone conversations with both Putin and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine. Zelenskyy invited Modi to visit during their meeting at the G7 in Italy, and there has been some talk of the Prime Minister possibly travelling to Kyiv.

However, Modi stayed away from the peace summit on Ukraine hosted by Switzerland last month, and India did not sign the joint communique. Russia called the summit a "waste of

time" and did not attend, and India took the position that "only those options acceptable to both parties can lead to abiding peace".

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

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