

House scan on NREGA attendance

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New Delhi: The Centre has kept open the option of manual registration of attendance under the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) if there is difficulty in online registration, Parliament was told on Tuesday, amid protests by workers over loss of pay due to attendance issues caused by poor Internet connectivity.

Rural development minister Giriraj Singh told the Lok Sabha the National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS) had been introduced to facilitate online attendance of workers under the MGNREGA, which provides for up to 100 days of unskilled work to every rural household in a year.

The ministry of rural development had made online attendance registration mandatory under the NMMS from January 1, keeping a manual attendance option open only in case of emergencies.

A worker's photograph has to be taken twice a day, once at 11am and again at 4pm, at the worksite and uploaded on the MGNREGA website immediately. Since Internet connectivity is poor in many rural areas, the attendance of workers is not being registered, causing loss of pay.

Hundreds of workers from across the country have been sitting on a dharna for over a month in Delhi to demand restoration of attendance through muster roll, withdrawal of the order for Aadhaar-enabled wage payment, release of funds to Bengal that has been withheld for over a year over corruption allegations and increase in allocation of funds for the scheme.

YSR Congress Party MPs in the Lok Sabha, Krishna Devarayalu Lavu and Balashowry Vallabbhaneni, wanted to know on Tuesday whether the majority of the workers were facing difficulty in attendance registration under the NMMS and the steps taken by the government to alleviate the problem.

Singh, the rural development minister, said technical issues were being addressed on a real-time basis and suggested relaxations and the provision of manual attendance had been built into the new online system.

"NMMS application has been modified to capture the



MGNREGA workers from different states protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Tuesday

second photograph just after 4 hours of uploading the attendance and first photograph. It has eased out the specific time point requirement for capturing the attendance and photographs. The morning attendance along with the first photograph can be captured in offline mode and to be uploaded once the device comes into a network," Singh said in a written reply.

"In case of exceptional circumstances due to which attendance could not be uploaded, the District Programme Coordinator has been authorised to upload the manual attendance," he added.

Vijay Ram, a researcher on the MGNREGA, said the provisions of manual attendance had not been entirely done away with when online attendance was introduced. He said flexibility in the time of uploading of pictures was also not new.

Economist and public policy expert Jean Dreze said, however, that manual attendance had become a cumbersome process.

"Manual attendance is hardly being implemented on the ground. If the NMMS fails, the manual attendance has to be processed at gram panchayat, then the block and the district level. It can be blocked at any level. Its success is like one in a thousand cases," he said.

The Aadhaar-enabled payment system has shut out 57 per cent workers from wages as they do not comply with the new mode, civil society groups have said, dealing a second blow to the rural job scheme after the mandatory online attendance rule.

The workers are also agitated about the reduction of funds under the MGNREGA. The government has allocated Rs 60,000 crore for the scheme against Rs 73,000 crore allocated last year.