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CURRENT AFFAIRS

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MANUAL SCAVENGING IN INDIA

This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and the topic details "Manual Scavenging in India". The topic "Manual Scavenging in India" has relevance in the "Social Justice" section of the UPSC CSE exam.

For Prelims:

What is Manual Scavenging?

For Mains:

GS2: Government policies and interventions.

GS2: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population.

Why in the news?

The Ministry of Social Justice recently announced in Parliament that 530 districts across India have reported being free of manual scavenging.

About Manual scavenging

- Manual scavenging refers to the unsafe and manual removal of raw human excreta from unhygienic latrines or open drains.
- The official definition of a manual scavenger in Indian law is someone who is engaged or employed by an individual, local authority, agency, or contractor to manually clean, carry, dispose of, or handle human excreta from insanitary latrines, open drains, pits, railway tracks, or other designated spaces, as notified by the Central or State Government.

Causes of Manual Scavenging

- Inadequate waterborne latrines
- Incomplete rehabilitation and employment opportunities
- Poor liberation strategies
- Social stigmatization

Effects of Manual Scavenging

- Health-related issues
- Structural violence against manual scavengers
- Caste and gender discrimination
- Social discrimination

Causes of Manual Scavenging:

- **Inadequate waterborne latrines:** In urban areas, dry latrines are widely used, contributing significantly to manual scavenging. According to the latest census data, India has approximately 26 million insanitary latrines.
- **Incomplete rehabilitation and employment opportunities:** The absence of adequate employment opportunities and support for families whose breadwinners engage in manual scavenging further perpetuates this problem.
- **Poor liberation strategies:** Manual scavengers are not provided with proper strategies to liberate themselves psychologically. This lack of support can trap them deeper into the practice of manual scavenging.
- **Social stigmatisation:** Manual scavengers face societal stigma, being considered untouchable due to their work. This exclusion prevents them from participating in community activities, finding employment, or renting houses.

Effects of Manual Scavenging:

- **Health-related issues:**
 - Exposure to harmful gases such as hydrogen disulfide, carbon dioxide, ammonia, and methane puts manual scavengers at risk of developing severe health issues.
 - Prolonged exposure to hydrogen disulfide can result in asphyxia and even death. Musculoskeletal disorders, such as osteoarthritis, are common among scavengers.
 - Additionally, exposure to sewer infections, including diseases like Leptospirosis, poses a significant occupational health risk.
- **Structural violence against manual scavengers:**
 - Manual scavengers face two types of violence—social violence and violence based on caste discrimination.
 - In India, the caste system is often used to justify violence against them, perpetuating their plight. Discrimination and prejudice towards manual scavengers are systemic and form a type of structural violence.
- **Caste and gender discrimination:**
 - Manual scavengers, mostly women and members of marginalized castes, are trapped in this occupation due to caste-based discrimination.
 - They are excluded from accessing better job opportunities, making manual scavenging appear as their only option for work.
- **Social discrimination:**
 - They are considered untouchable, and this discriminatory attitude forces them to accept their circumstances.
 - The problem extends to their children, who also face discrimination and are compelled to follow in their parents' footsteps, continuing the cycle of manual scavenging.

Major Legislative and Programmatic Interventions to Address Manual Scavenging:

Legislative Measures:

- **The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013**
 - Enacted by Parliament to prohibit manual scavenging and provide rehabilitation to those engaged in this practice.

- **National Commission for Safai Karamcharis**

- It was constituted on 12th August 1994 as a statutory body through The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993.

Programmatic Interventions:

- **National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem” (NAMASTE):** “NAMASTE” is a nationwide program aimed at promoting mechanized sanitation in all Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) across the country. The primary components of this initiative encompass:
 - **Identification:** The scheme aims to identify Sewer/Septic Tank Workers (SSWs).
 - **Occupational Training and PPE Distribution:** It provides training to SSWs and supplies them with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits.
 - **Safety Devices for Sanitation Response Units (SRUs):** Assistance is given to Sanitation Response Units in acquiring safety devices.
 - **Health Insurance:** The scheme provides health insurance to identified SSWs and their families under the Ayushman Bharat- Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY). This means that they will be able to access free or low-cost healthcare services at any of the empanelled hospitals across the country.
 - **Livelihood Assistance:** NAMASTE supports mechanization and enterprise development by offering financial aid and subsidies to sanitation workers for procuring sanitation-related equipment.
 - **IEC Campaign:** Joint campaigns by ULBs and NSKFDC will be carried out to raise awareness about the interventions of NAMASTE.
 - Namaste is a **central sector scheme** of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission:**
 - Construction of over 10.88 crore sanitary toilets in rural areas and 62.64 lakh in urban areas.
 - Conversion of insanitary toilets into sanitary toilets.
 - Contributed significantly towards eliminating manual scavenging.
- **Swachhata Abhiyaan Mobile App:**
 - Launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on 24th December 2020.
 - Aimed to capture data on insanitary latrines and associated manual scavengers.
 - Over 6000 cases have been uploaded on the app, but no confirmed insanitary latrine has been reported so far.
- **Survey and Identification:** Surveys Conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment:
 - Two surveys in 2013 and 2018 for identifying manual scavengers.
 - Identified 58,098 eligible manual scavengers who received one-time cash assistance.

Challenges:

- **Underreporting of Cases:** The majority of cases related to hazardous occupations like manual scavenging are not properly recorded. The existence of social media has shed light on some incidents that might have remained hidden otherwise. In certain instances, private companies offer monetary settlements to victims to deter them from filing complaints.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Most cases come to public attention only when a person dies while cleaning septic tanks. This indicates a lack of awareness and proper monitoring of such dangerous practices.

- **Poverty and Involvement of Oppressed Communities:** Many individuals from marginalized communities are forced into manual scavenging due to poverty, particularly in urban areas. They find themselves handling human and animal waste as a means of survival.
- **Inadequate Safety Measures:** Workers are often subjected to hazardous conditions with insufficient protective gear and technological support. Despite the risks, they continue to perform the tasks manually.
- **Poor Conviction Rate:** A Parliamentary Panel highlighted the dismal conviction rate in such cases. Out of 616 FIRs registered against contractors for unsafe sewer cleaning, only one conviction was recorded, indicating a lack of effective enforcement and justice for victims.

Measures Needed:

- **Acquisition of Machinery for Sewer and Septic Tank Cleaning**
- **Robust Monitoring by Local Government**
- **Implementation of Bio Toilets**
- **Increased Funding for Rehabilitation**

The elimination of manual scavenging requires a multi-faceted approach and collective effort from the government, civil society, and the public. It is not only a matter of sanitation but also of social justice and human rights. By prioritising this issue and implementing comprehensive measures, progress can be made towards a society free from this dehumanising practice.

Sources:

530 districts reported as free of manual scavenging: Centre – The Hindu
Infographic- Deccan Herald

Q1. With reference Manual scavenging, consider the following statements:

1. Manual scavenging refers to the safe and automated removal of raw human excreta from hygienic latrines or closed drains.
2. Public Health and sanitation is included in the Concurrent list of the Seventh Schedule.
3. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 is enacted by the parliament to prohibit manual scavenging and rehabilitation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) None

Answer: (d)

Q2. Consider the following:

1. Swachhata Abhiyaan Mobile App was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
2. NAMASTE is a centrally sponsored scheme of the Union of India.
3. National Commission for Safai Karamcharis a statutory body created under Act of the Parliament.

How many of the above statement/s is/are correct ?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: (a)

Q3. What are the reasons behind the continued prevalence of manual scavenging in India? Discuss the measures can be proposed to effectively address and eradicate this issue.

Gaurav Nikumbh

INDIA-AUSTRALIA DEFENCE POLICY TALKS

This article covers "Daily Current Affairs" and the topic details "India-Australia Defence Policy Talks". The topic "India-Australia Defence Policy Talks" has relevance in the International Relations section of the UPSC CSE exam.

For Prelims:

Highlights of the Talks?

For Mains:

GS 2: International Relations

Multiple Aspects of India-Australia Relations?

Way Forward?

Why in the news?

During the recently held India-Australia Defence Policy Talks in Canberra, both countries reiterated their commitment to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Highlights of the Talks:

- **Bilateral Defence Cooperation:** India and Australia reviewed and explored new initiatives to strengthen their defence engagements.
- **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership:** Both parties reiterated their dedication to the complete implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, emphasizing the importance of mutual trust, shared interests, and common values as the foundation of their cooperation.
- **Indian Defence Industry Cooperation:** During the discussions, India emphasized the possibilities of collaboration between its defence industry and the Australian Armed forces concerning shipbuilding and maintenance plans.
- **Hydrography Agreement:** Both sides agreed to finalize the hydrography agreement at an early stage.

Multiple Aspects of India-Australia Relations:

Historical Perspective:

- **Diplomatic Relations:** Diplomatic relations between Australia and India were established in 1941, with the opening of the Consulate General of India in Sydney, during the pre-Independence era.
- **Uranium Supply Deal:** In 2014, Australia signed a uranium supply deal with India, the first of its kind with a non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, recognizing India's non-proliferation record.

Strategic Ties:

- **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership:** In 2020, the bilateral relationship was elevated from Strategic Partnership to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit.
- **High-Level Engagements:** Several high-level engagements and ministerial visits occurred in 2022 and 2023, including the India-Australia virtual summit and Foreign Ministers meet.
- **Defence Cooperation:** The first India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue took place in 2021. The Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) was signed in 2020 to enhance defence cooperation.
- **Joint Military Exercises:** Both countries conducted bilateral and multilateral military exercises, including Malabar with India, Japan, and the US.

China Factor:

- **Strained Australia-China Ties:** Australia's actions, such as banning Huawei and criticizing China's human rights violations, led to strained relations and trade barriers from China.
- **India-China Border Tensions:** India has faced aggression along its border with China, highlighting shared concerns between India and Australia.
- **Convergence of Interests:** Both countries support a rules-based international order and are part of the Quad, seeking regional institutions in the Indo-Pacific that promote economic integration.

Multilateral Cooperation:

- **Membership in Various Forums:** Both countries are members of Quad, Commonwealth, IORA, ASEAN Regional Forum, Indo-Pacific Economic Forum, East Asia Summits, etc.



- **Economic Cooperation:** India and Australia signed the Economic Cooperation Trade Agreement, and they are partners in the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative.

Cooperation in Education and Clean Energy

- **Educational Qualifications Recognition:** A mechanism for mutual recognition of educational qualifications was signed to facilitate student mobility.
- **Clean Energy:** Both countries signed a Letter of Intent on New and Renewable Energy and committed funds to the India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership.

Way Forward:

- **Strengthening Ties:** India and Australia aim to further strengthen their ties and play an active role in ensuring a rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Shared Objectives:** Both countries envision a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region, resolving conflicts through dialogue and avoiding coercive actions.
- **Bilateral Summits:** Regular bilateral summits provide an opportunity to enhance cooperation and strategic alignment between India and Australia.
- **Active Indo-Pacific Role:** India and Australia seek to actively contribute to regional stability and economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region.

Facts about Australia Relevant for India	Description
Geography	
Location	Australia is a continent and a country located in the Southern Hemisphere.
Neighboring Countries	Australia shares maritime borders with Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Papua New Guinea.
Trade Partnership	Australia is a significant trade partner for India, ranking as one of India’s major trading partners.
Major Exports to India	Key Australian exports to India include coal, gold, and education-related services.
Major Imports from India	Major imports from India include precious metals, pearls, and machinery.
Strategic Importance	
Indo-Pacific Region	Australia is a key player in the Indo-Pacific region and supports India’s Act East Policy.
Membership in Quad	Both India and Australia are members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).
Climate and Environment	
Biodiversity and Conservation	Both countries share an interest in biodiversity conservation

	and environmental issues.
Climate Change Cooperation	India and Australia cooperate in addressing climate change challenges.
Defence Cooperation	
Military Exercises	India and Australia conduct joint military exercises to enhance defence cooperation.
Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)	Signed in 2020 to strengthen military ties and support each other's operations.

SOURCE:

<https://www.aninews.in/news/world/others/india-australia-defence-policy-talks-held-in-canberra-both-sides-reaffirm-commitment-for-comprehensive-strategic-partnership20230726182731/>

Q.1 Which of the following forums have common membership of both India and Australia?

1. Quad
2. ASEAN Regional Forum
3. Commonwealth
4. Malabar Exercises

Select the correct option:

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 1, 2, and 3 only
- (c) 1, 2, and 4 only
- (d) All of the above

Answer: (c)

Q.2 Consider the following statements regarding the location of Australia:

1. Australia is located in the Southern Hemisphere.
2. It is the largest country in Oceania.
3. The country is situated between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 and 2
- (b) Only 2 and 3
- (c) Only 1 and 3
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: (d)

Q.3 "Discuss the significance of India-Australia strategic cooperation in promoting regional stability and addressing common challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Examine the key areas of cooperation and the potential for further enhancing the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries.

Rishabh