

MGNREGS Work Demand Drops 2% in May with Bengal Work Suspended

Rises 34% sequentially on muted farm activities, also more households sought work in May

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New Delhi: Demand for work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) dropped in May from a year before, as work remained suspended in West Bengal — traditionally a major beneficiary of the programme — in light of alleged misappropriation of funds there. However, sequentially, the work demand rose sharply in May from the April level, reflecting the typical trend in summer when farm activities remain subdued.

About 42.66 million individuals opted for work under the scheme in May, down 2% from a year before but up 34% from the April level, according to the preliminary data compiled by the rural development ministry. However, members of a higher number of households — 31.76 million — sought work in May which represented a rise of more than 3% from a year before and 32% from the previous month, the data showed.

Excluding West Bengal from the pan-India data, however, showed a marginal 0.4% year-on-year rise in work demand (in the individual category) in May. Demand came from only 5,938 individuals in May in the eastern state, against one



million a year before. These data get revised regularly as and when updated information flows in.

Senior government officials say work demand under the scheme typically remains higher during the summer than earlier months, as farm activities ease after the rabi harvest. Also, this is the best time to undertake MGNREGS works like building water bodies, etc, before the rainy season.

The Centre had stopped the release of

funds to West Bengal in early 2022 under Section 27 of the MGNREGA on the ground that the state had failed to initiate adequate action against those involved in the alleged irregularities detected by national monitoring teams in 2019 and 2021, according to a senior official.

In the 'individuals' category, apart from West Bengal, work demand in May was driven down by states like Andhra Pradesh (6.29 million vs 7.25 million a year earlier), Telangana (3.15



RISING EXPENSES



According to govt's revised estimate, spending on the MGNREGS was likely to rise to ₹89,400 crore in FY23

million vs 4.66 million) and Bihar (2.74 million vs 3.04 million). However, those who helped prop up demand in May were Tamil Nadu (5.26 million vs 3.88 million a year earlier), Chhattisgarh (2.80 million vs 1.58 million) and Jharkhand (1.15 million vs 0.42 million).

Having hit a FY23 peak of 43.51 million in May 2022, work demand in the 'individuals' category eased to as low as 18.64 million in October before rising again almost steadily (except January), the data showed. According to revised estimate, spending on the MGNREGS was expected to rise to Rs 89,400 crore in FY23 from the budgeted Rs 73,000 crore. The government has budgeted Rs 60,000 crore for FY24, but finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has indicated that more funds would be allocated for the scheme if required.