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The Hindu

11/07/2024

Even the odd jobs: On the Karnataka gig workers bill

*Gig workers need a **comprehensive** national law recognising their employee status*

For India's gig workers, who are increasing in numbers but are **perched precariously** on the edge of the unregulated labour pool, the Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2024, offers a welcome **reprieve**, but still stops short of providing them with the security of being employees. When app-based gig work was introduced a decade ago, courtesy ride-sharing and food delivery apps, the absence of the word 'employee' was actually seen as a positive; it supposedly offered a chance for 'partners' to retain their autonomy and earn good money without being locked into a contract with rigid timings. That illusion soon dissolved as incomes crashed and working hours lengthened, and the lack of a formal 'employee' status left workers at the mercy of the aggregator and all-powerful algorithms, in the absence of safety nets or governmental regulation. Despite this, the gig economy is growing. According to a NITI Aayog report, India had 77 lakh gig workers at the beginning of the decade, and by 2029-30, they are projected to account for 4.1% of income, and 6.7% of the non-agricultural workforce.

A rights-based legislation, the draft Bill aims to prevent arbitrary dismissals, provide human grievance redress mechanisms, and to bring more transparency

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into the **opaque** tangle of automated monitoring and algorithm-based payments. It is a step up from the Union government's Code on Social Security, 2020. Karnataka's law also offers social security through a welfare board and fund, with contributions from the government and the aggregator, either through a cut from every transaction on the app, or as a percentage of the platform's turnover in the State. Noting that many of the firms that own these platforms report minimal profits, workers' unions have rightly demanded that the welfare fee is charged as a cess on each transaction. **Sceptics** note the **moribund** nature of other unorganised sector welfare boards, but one advantage of mandatory registration with such a board is that it will make gig workers visible in the eyes of the law. Karnataka's Congress government aims to enact the Bill in the monsoon session of the Assembly, and it must quickly formulate rules and establish the welfare board to ensure that the law is in force before the end of the year. A similar legislation in Rajasthan, enacted by the predecessor Congress government, has been effectively put into cold storage by the BJP government. At the national level, comprehensive legislation is needed not just to set minimum wages, reasonable working hours and conditions and **robust** social security but also to provide gig workers with the **coveted** status of 'employees'.

Vocabulary

1. Comprehensive

Synonyms: Exhaustive, inclusive, thorough

Antonyms: Incomplete, limited, partial

2. Perched

Synonyms: seated, resting

Antonyms: unsettled, dislodged

3. Precariously

Synonyms: perilously, dangerously, insecurely

Antonyms: securely, safely, steadily

4. Reprive

Synonyms: Pardon, respite, postponement

Antonyms: Punishment, condemnation, sentence

5. Opaque

Synonyms: Non-transparent, cloudy, murky

Antonyms: Transparent, clear, lucid

6. Sceptics

Synonyms: Doubters, Cynics, Questioners

Antonyms: Believers, Trusters, Faithful

7. Moribund

Synonyms: Dying, declining, stagnant

Antonyms: Thriving, flourishing, active

8. Robust

Synonyms: strong, sturdy, resilient, vigorous

Antonyms: weak, fragile, feeble, delicate



9. Coveted

Synonyms: desired, prized, sought-after, coveted

Antonyms: undesired, unwanted, unvalued, uncherished



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The Hindu

11/07/2024

Locked in conflict: On the standoff in West Bengal

Governors and Chief Ministers must step back from a political confrontation

In calling for a report from the State government on the action taken against two police officers, West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose has **escalated** the conflict between Raj Bhavan and the State government. He has written to the Union government and to the Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, about what he perceives as **impropriety** by Vineet Goyal, Kolkata City Police Commissioner, and Indira Mukherjee, a Deputy Commissioner of Police. The Governor is aggrieved that they made remarks pertaining to an investigation into a complaint of alleged sexual harassment that a Raj Bhavan employee had made against him. While the complaint has not been acted upon — as Mr. Bose enjoys immunity from proceedings under Article 361 of the Constitution — it has become a **thorny** issue, with the Governor believing that the police officers had **flouted** the rules of conduct in speaking about an investigation that cannot be instituted or continued. His **consternation** is also because he believes the Commissioner had stopped a group of people with grievances about post-election violence from meeting him, even though he had agreed to meet them. The Governor has also demanded a report on the action taken with regard to a woman being disrobed in public, a couple being **flogged** and other incidents of mob violence, undoubtedly a legitimate request.

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The Governor is indeed authorised to seek information from the State government under Article 167. Whether disciplinary action involving central service officers, normally within the domain of the State governments when they are serving the State, can be initiated at the instance of the Governor or the Union government is a separate question altogether. Mr. Bose has cited circumstances surrounding the harassment complaint against him to argue that it is a “**concocted** allegation”, “induced and facilitated” by the police. However, it may not be in anyone’s interest to escalate such issues by asking for **punitive** action against officers. At a time when personal **squabbles** and institutional conflicts between Governors and Chief Ministers are on the rise, the development is likely to be seen as one more stand-off involving the politicisation of Raj Bhavan by incumbents seeking to undermine elected regimes. The two sides appear locked in **perennial** conflict, mirroring the **antagonism** between the Centre and the State. There is the usual one over grant of assent to Bills, and a recent one involves the question who should administer the oath of office to newly elected legislators. And there is a **defamation** suit the Governor has filed against the Chief Minister. Constitutional functionaries should pull back from the **brink** before they are sucked into a political rabbit hole.

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Vocabulary

1. Escalated

Synonyms: intensified, increased, heightened, raised

Antonyms: decreased, lowered, reduced

2. Impropriety

Synonyms: inappropriateness, indecency, misconduct, indiscretion

Antonyms: propriety, decorum, correctness, appropriateness

3. Thorny

Synonyms: prickly, spiky, problematic, challenging

Antonyms: smooth, easy, straightforward, uncomplicated

4. Flouted

Synonyms: defy, disobey, disregard, ignore, mock, scorn

Antonyms: defy, disobey, disregard, ignore, mock, scorn

5. Consternation

Synonyms: dismay, bewilderment, confusion, panic

Antonyms: calm, composure, tranquility, assurance

6. Flogged

Synonyms: whipped, lashed, beat, thrashed

Antonyms: praised, lauded, commended, honoured

7. Concocted

Synonyms: devised, fabricated, concocted, contrived

Antonyms: uncovered, exposed

8. Punitive

Synonyms: disciplinary, retaliatory

Antonyms: lenient, forgiving



9. Squabbles

Synonyms: arguments, disputes, disagreements

Antonyms: agreements, harmony

10. Perennial

Synonyms: enduring, everlasting, persistent, perpetual

Antonyms: temporary, transient, ephemeral, occasional

11. Antagonism

Synonyms: hostility, conflict, opposition, enmity

Antonyms: harmony, cooperation

12. Defamation

Synonyms: slander, libel, calumny, smear, vilification

Antonyms: praise, commendation, accolade, endorsement, approval

13. Brink

Synonyms: edge, verge, threshold, rim

Antonyms: centre, interior, middle, core, heart

