

Employment:GKRA - Yet Another Mirage

On June 20, Prime Minister Modi announced that Rs 50,000 crore would be spent for giving jobs to returnee migrants by building durable rural infrastructure under the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (GKRA). What is this GKRA? Is it going to address the chronic unemployment problem in rural areas, aggravated by returned migrants?

Under the scheme, 25 work areas have been identified for generating employment in villages, like rural housing for the poor, plantation, provision of drinking water through Jal Jeevan mission, construction of panchayat bhavans, community toilets, rural mandis, rural roads, cattle sheds, anganwadi bhavans, etc.

The Prime Minister also said that modern facilities, like high-speed and cheap internet, will be provided in rural areas. In other words, another activity will be the laying of optic fibre cables and related work is also a part of the GKRA.

The GKRA will be implemented in 116 districts of six states for 125 days, each with a large number of returnee migrant workers. These are: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha.

The fallacy of PM's claims could be seen by examining the funds allocated for GKRA. As usual, there is no additional financial allocation earmarked for this scheme. The Abhiyan will simply put together already existing schemes from 12 different Ministries, which include the Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Road Transport & Highways, Mines, Drinking Water & Sanitation, Environment, Railways, Petroleum & Natural Gas, New & Renewable Energy, Border Roads, Telecom and Agriculture.

So, for instance, fibre optic cable laying for Bharat Net was already on the cards and funds were already allocated for it in this year's Budget. This will now become part of GKRA. The same holds true for rural roads, anganwadi centres and panchayat bhavans and so on.

What Modi has done is that money already earmarked for these activities will be released to the 116 districts. His schemeed through. It is clear that no single additional job would be created through this scheme. If a panchayat building or a road is sanctioned in the plan, the same work would be done by same number of people, mostly local. The additional job creation is only a mirage, dangled before the eyes of people to make them run for illusory jobs.

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