

**UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 2 Governance – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.**

### **Progress of Aadhaar-Based Payment Systems for NREGA Wage Payments**

**Overview:** The Rural Development Ministry recently mandated Aadhaar-Based Payment Systems (ABPS) in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). While the government claims several advantages of ABPS, critics highlight issues and advocate for account-based payments.

#### **Payments Through ABPS:**

1. Worker's Aadhaar linked to job card.
2. Aadhaar linked to bank account.
3. Aadhaar mapped with bank branch through NPCI software.
4. Aadhaar acts as the financial address for cash transfer.

#### **Advantages Claimed by the Government:**

1. **Duplicate Job Card Removal:**
  - Claim: ABPS will eliminate duplicate job cards, leading to savings.
  - Issue: Lack of publicly available audits and scientific assessments of gains. Evidence suggests officials delete job cards under pressure, and savings claims are exaggerated.
2. **Reduced Payment Delays:**
  - Claim: ABPS will reduce wage payment delays.
  - Issue: Timely payments depend on fund allocation. Evidence shows no statistically significant difference in payment speed between ABPS and account-based payments.
3. **Lower Payment Rejections:**
  - Claim: ABPS will result in lower payment rejections.
  - Issue: Studies find no statistically significant difference in rejection rates between the two payment modes.

#### **Other Issues with ABPS:**

1. **Lack of Evidence:**
  - Issue: Government lacks credible evidence supporting the shift to ABPS.
2. **Complex Procedure:**
  - Issue: Any incorrect step in ABPS denies work, delays wages, or affects the worker's preferred account.
3. **Spelling Mismatches:**
  - Issue: Common due to different administrative units creating documents, leading to complications.

#### **Authors' Perspective:**

- **Preference for Account-Based Payments:**
  - Reason: Difficulties in resolving ABPS issues are perceived as greater than those in account-based payments.

In conclusion, the authors advocate for account-based payments, emphasizing their perceived simplicity and effectiveness in addressing issues compared to the complexities associated with ABPS in MGNREGS payments.

**UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 2 Indian Polity – Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.**

**Issues with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**

**Background:** The recently released RBI report on 'Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions' sheds light on the fiscal health of local governance bodies in India, emphasizing their crucial role in rural development and governance.

**Importance of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):**

1. **Critical for Governance and Rural Development:**
  - PRIs play a vital role in local governance and contribute significantly to rural development, crucial as 69% of the population resides in rural areas.
2. **Implementation of Policies:**
  - They translate the vision and developmental policies of the Central and State governments into actionable initiatives.
3. **Familiarity with Local Needs:**
  - PRIs possess detailed information on local citizens' needs, making them well-suited to provide basic public goods and services like health, education, and sanitation.

**Challenges with Panchayati Raj Institutions:**

1. **Financial Constraints:**
  - PRIs face challenges due to inadequate independent financial resources, leading to heavy reliance on grants from higher tiers of government.
2. **Lack of Trained Manpower:**
  - PRIs encounter difficulties due to a shortage of trained manpower, hindering their effective functioning.
3. **Insufficient Devolution of Power:**
  - Political unwillingness to devolve more power and functions to local governments poses a challenge.
4. **Weak Infrastructure:**
  - PRIs struggle with weak infrastructure, impacting their ability to execute responsibilities effectively.
5. **Regional Disparities:**
  - The devolution of powers varies across states, with southern states outperforming others in implementing Panchayati Raj.

**Issues with PRI Finances:**

1. **Lack of Own Revenues:**
  - PRIs have not significantly increased their own revenues through sources like property tax, fees, and fines.
2. **Dependence on Transfers:**
  - PRIs heavily rely on transfers from higher levels of government, limiting financial self-reliance and decision-making power, contrary to the subsidiarity principle.

In conclusion, the author identifies inadequate resources as the primary challenge faced by PRIs, emphasizing the need for financial empowerment to enhance their effectiveness in local governance.

**UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper 2 International Relations – Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.**

**India and France Bilateral Relations – Ceremony, substance**

**Background:** French President Macron's recent visit to India as the Chief Guest for the Republic Day Parade marked a significant event in India-France bilateral relations.

**Recent Developments (2023):**

1. **Sealed Agreements (25 Years of Strategic Partnership):**
  - India and France solidified multiple agreements, celebrating the 25th anniversary of their strategic partnership.
2. **Horizon 2047 Framework:**
  - Introduced to enhance cooperation in diverse areas, including defence, space, and nuclear energy.
3. **Defence Cooperation Plans:**
  - Announcement of plans involving joint production of military hardware, technology transfers, and procurement deals for French aircraft, engines, and submarines.

**Outcomes of the Visit:**

1. **Defence Industrial Roadmap:**
  - Focus on co-designing, co-developing, and co-producing defence hardware across various domains (air, land, sea) and a space-defence partnership.
2. **Miscellaneous MoUs:**
  - Agreements signed in sectors like agriculture, digital health, and science and technology cooperation.
3. **Joint Statement on Global Geopolitics:**
  - Shared positions on condemning terror attacks, advocating for humanitarian assistance in Gaza and Ukraine, and expressing concerns over Red Sea attacks.

**Areas Requiring Focus:**

1. **Defence Hardware Deals:**
  - Emphasis on advancing agreements in defence hardware.
2. **Nuclear Cooperation:**
  - Collaboration for the delayed power project in Jaitapur and small modular reactors

The India-France relationship is an evolving partnership, showcasing continuity based on mutual respect for strategic autonomy and a joint commitment to a blend of "tradition and innovation."