

CONTEMPT FOR LABOUR: ON DILUTION OF LABOUR LAWS

Centre Should Not Allow Exemptions from Welfare Laws for Workers Mooted by States

At a time when everyone is awaiting an early end to the health and economic crisis caused by the global pandemic, the interests of labourers and workers are once again set to be sacrificed. The revival of business and economic activity after weeks of forced closure is indeed a key objective to be achieved. However, it is amoral and perverse on the part of some States to address this need by granting sweeping exemptions from legal provisions aimed at protecting labourers and employees in factories, industries and other establishments. Madhya Pradesh has embarked on a plan to give a boost to business and industry by allowing units to be operated without many of the requirements of the Factories Act — working hours may extend to 12 hours, instead of eight, and weekly duty up to 72 hours. Going by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's remarks, it appears the State has used Section 5 of the Act, which permits exemption from its provisions for three months, in the hope that the Centre would approve such suspension for at least a thousand days. However, this exemption can be given only during a 'public emergency', defined in a limited way as a threat to security due to war or external aggression. Uttar Pradesh has approved an ordinance suspending for three years all labour laws, save a few ones relating to the abolition of child and bonded labour, women employees, construction workers and payment of wages, besides compensation to workmen for accidents while on duty. Reports suggest that several States are following their example in the name of boosting economic activity.

Changes in the manner in which labour laws operate in a State may require the Centre's assent. One hopes the Centre, which is pursuing a labour reform agenda through consolidated codes for wages, industrial relations and occupational safety, health and working conditions, would not readily agree to wholesale exemptions from legal safeguards and protections the law now affords to workers. The most egregious aspect of the country's response to the pandemic was its inability to protect the most vulnerable sections and its vast underclass of labourers from its impact. The emphasis in the initial phase was on dealing with the health crisis, even when the consequence was the creation of an economic crisis. While the country watches with horror the continuance of the collective misery of migrant workers well into the third spell of the national lockdown, the attitude of the ruling class towards labour remains one of utter apathy, bordering on contempt. Why else would a government relieve factories of even elementary duties such as providing drinking water, first aid boxes and protective equipment? Or suspend requirements such as cleanliness, ventilation, lighting, canteens, restrooms and crèches?

Meanings of Difficult Words:

1. **contempt** (noun) – disrespect, scorn, disregard, neglect.
2. **dilution** (noun) – reduction in value/ power/ force of something.
3. **exemption** (noun) – exclusion, relief/ release, exception.
4. **moot** (verb) – propose, suggest, put forward.
5. **await** (verb) – wait for, expect, anticipate, look/hope for.
6. **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
7. **interest** (noun) – concern, care.
8. **set** (adjective/predicative) – likely.
9. **revival** (noun) – restoration, comeback, re-establishment, reintroduction, ,

10. **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually, undeniably.
11. **key** (adjective) – essential, important, significant.
12. **objective** (noun) – aim, intention, purpose.
13. **amoral** (adjective) – unprincipled, unethical, unscrupulous, without standards/morals.
14. **perverse** (adjective) – illogical, irrational, unreasonable; wrong, incorrect.
15. **address** (verb) – tackle, deal with, attend to, try to sort out.
16. **grant** (verb) – give, provide, confer, award.
17. **sweeping** (adjective) – complete, total, extensive, wholesale.
18. **provision** (noun) – term, clause, stipulation, requirement/condition.
19. **embark on** (phrasal verb) – start, begin, initiate/commence.
20. **boost** (noun) – encouragement, support, stimulus, fillip.
21. **up** (verb) – increase, raise, extend.
22. **go by** (phrasal verb) – to follow something.
23. **suspension** (noun) – (temporary) removal, elimination, rejection.
24. **external aggression** (noun) – it can be defined as unilateral attacks with force by one state against another state without a formal declaration of war.
25. **ordinance** (noun) – order, rule, act.
26. **save** (preposition) – besides, except for, apart from.
27. **in the name of** (phrase) – for the sake of, at the behest of.
28. **assent** (noun) – agreement, acceptance, approval.
29. **pursue** (verb) – engage in, conduct, follow, carry on.
30. **consolidated** (adjective) – combined, united/merged; fortified, strengthened.
31. **readily** (adverb) – without difficulty, without delay, quickly, easily.
32. **wholesale** (adjective) – extensive, total, complete, sweeping.
33. **safeguard** (noun) – protection, security, safety measure.
34. **afford** (verb) – provide, present, grant, offer.
35. **egregious** (adjective) – shocking, horrible/terrible, very bad.
36. **inability** (noun) – lack of ability, incapability, ineffectiveness.
37. **vulnerable** (adjective) – unprotected, unguarded, helpless; relating to a weak/neglected person who is in need of special care/support.
38. **underclass** (noun) – poor & unemployed people.
39. **consequence** (noun) – outcome, (end) result, aftermath, ramification, repercussion.
40. **watch** (verb) – observe, view, look at.
41. **continuance** (noun) – continuation, prolongation, carrying on.
42. **collective** (adjective) – overall, aggregate, whole; common, shared.
43. **misery** (noun) – pain, distress, suffering.
44. **well into** (phrase) – far into something; it means a significant amount of time has passed since the beginning of something.
45. **attitude** (noun) – standpoint, approach, point of view, way of thinking.
46. **apathy** (noun) – disregard, lack of interest, unconcern.
47. **border on** (verb) – approach, come close to, look like.
48. **relieve** (verb) – release (someone) from responsibility.
49. **crèche** (noun) – a nursery or daycare center; a place where small children are looked after while their parents are doing something else (working, studying, etc.,)

ERADICATE IT: ON FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Sudan's Decision To End Female Genital Mutilation Builds On Its Political Transition

Sudan's decision to outlaw the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is a landmark victory for women's rights in a country that is still in a transition from dictatorship to democracy. The development follows the transitional government's decision to scrap the repressive social codes and humiliating penalties that targeted women during the nearly 30-year dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir, which fell last year amid protests. Hundreds of Sudanese professionals who spearheaded the protests, had clamoured for a broad-based and inclusive constitutional order. The new measure, which entails punishment with a fine and a prison sentence, must still be approved by the Supreme Council, made up of civilians and military officials, that oversees the democratic transition. The government's decision builds on the curbs already in place in a number of provinces, although enforcement has been a concern. The UN estimates that some 87% of Sudanese women have had their external genitalia removed on non-medical grounds during childhood, leaving them with life-long emotional and physical injuries. While the latest measure has been widely welcomed, campaigners remain cautious about a shift in attitude against this custom, regarded as crucial prior to matrimony.

According to the UN, over 200 million women in several African countries, including Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Djibouti and Senegal, and some in Asia, have been subject to this brutal social custom. While there is ongoing research to rectify the damage, WHO is somewhat sceptical about the effectiveness of recent reconstruction surgeries. The prevailing scenario thus underscores the need for stronger campaigns and bold actions to stop this social scourge. Even in countries where FGM is outlawed, enforcement remains an issue. In Egypt's first FGM trial in 2014, six years after Cairo clamped a ban, the doctor who had carried out the procedure, as well as the father of the deceased girl, were acquitted, despite incriminating forensic evidence. In Somalia, the country with the highest prevalence rate but no legal ban, the death of a girl in 2018 after a similar procedure led to the first prosecution in such incidents. In Uganda, reports last year of some 300 cases of mutilation within a month shed light on the government's uphill task to back existing legislation with vigorous awareness campaigns. In Kenya, where the practice was criminalised in 2011, the government strategy last year requiring girls to be tested for circumcision raised concerns of victimisation and privacy violation. These practices suggest that legislation alone may not stop this practice that has deep cultural roots. The government has to eradicate it. Sustaining the country's progressive currents and democratic transition would be crucial to consolidate the gender reforms it has introduced in recent months.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

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| <p>1. eradicate (verb) – remove, get rid of, eliminate, discard, abolish.</p> <p>2. genitalia (plural noun) – the genitals (reproductive organs).</p> <p>3. transition (noun) – change, transformation.</p> <p>4. female genital mutilation (FGM) (noun) – it comprises all procedures that involve partial</p> | <p>or total removal of the external female <i>genitalia</i>, or other injury to the female <i>genital</i> organs for non-medical reasons. (Courtesy: WHO).</p> <p>5. build on (phrasal verb) – to be/use as a basis for something; develop, enhance.</p> <p>6. transition (noun) – change, transformation.</p> |
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7. **outlaw** (verb) – ban, prohibit, forbid.
8. **custom** (noun) – practice, order, tradition.
9. **landmark** (noun modifier) – major (achievement), watershed (moment), historic (event/victory), milestone (event).
10. **transitional** (adjective) – interim, provisional, temporary.
11. **scrap** (verb) – remove, get rid of, eliminate, discard, abolish.
12. **repressive** (adjective) – oppressive, dominating/ coercive, authoritarian/ draconian.
13. **humiliating** (adjective) – embarrassing, degrading, demeaning, disgracing, humbling.
14. **fell** past of **fall** (verb) – topple, collapse, overthrow, bring down.
15. **amid** (preposition) – in the middle of, surrounded by; during.
16. **spearhead** (verb) – lead, head (an movement/protest); be in the forefront of.
17. **clamour** (verb) – protest, demand, push/press (a demand).
18. **broad-based** (adjective) – wide-ranging, general.
19. **inclusive** (adjective) – all-inclusive, comprehensive.
20. **measure** (noun) – statute, act, bill, law, legislation.
21. **entail** (verb) – cause, result in, produce.
22. **made (up) of** past and past participle of **make up** (phrasal verb) – form, compose, comprise.
23. **oversee** (verb) – supervise, administer, manage.
24. **curb** (noun) – restriction, limitation, restraint, control/check.
25. **in place** (phrase) – established, set up.
26. **enforcement** (noun) – execution, implementation, imposition.
27. **ground** (noun) – reason, factor, pretext/premise.
28. **campaigner** (noun) – crusader, fighter, champion/reformer.
29. **attitude** (noun) – standpoint, approach, point of view, way of thinking.
30. **subject to** (adjective) – liable to, predisposed to; vulnerable to, likely to suffer from.
31. **sceptical** (adjective) – doubtful, distrustful, disappointed.
32. **reconstruction surgery** (noun) – it is a surgery performed to restore the anatomy or the function of the body part to normal.
33. **prevailing** (adjective) – existing; current.
34. **scenario** (noun) – situation.
35. **underscore** (verb) – draw attention to, emphasize, highlight, underline.
36. **scourge** (noun) – burden, bane, affliction, misfortune, torment/suffering.
37. **clamp** (verb) – impose, inflict.
38. **carry out** (phrasal verb) – conduct, perform, execute.
39. **deceased** (adjective) – dead, passed away.
40. **acquit** (verb) – declare innocent; discharge, release, free (from a criminal charge).
41. **incriminate** (verb) – make someone appear guilty of a crime; implicate, inform against.
42. **forensic** (adjective) – relating to the application of scientific knowledge & methods to legal problems and legal proceeding.
43. **prevalence rate** (noun) – it refers to the number of cases of a disease that are present in a particular population at a given time.
44. **prosecution** (noun) – legal action/trial, legal proceeding, litigation.
45. **shed light on** (phrase) – explain, elucidate, clarify.
46. **uphill** (adjective) – arduous, difficult, hard/tough, taxing, demanding.
47. **back** (verb) – support, endorse, uphold.
48. **criminalise** (verb) – make something (an activity) illegal.
49. **female circumcision** (noun) – another word for female genital mutilation (FGM).

50. **victimisation** (noun) – an act of exploiting or victimizing someone (treat someone unfairly); exploitation, oppression.
51. **roots** (noun) – origins, reasons.
52. **sustain** (verb) – continue, carry on, maintain/retain, prolong.
53. **current** (noun) – movement, progression, tendency/trend.
54. **consolidate** (verb) – strengthen, make stronger, reinforce, fortify.