

## THE LAST LAP

### SOCIAL SECTOR

# Many missions rolled out, targets steep

Initiatives taken for urbanisation, women at workplace; panel set up with eye on subordinate OBC groups



The Swachh Bharat Mission has been found wanting on the waste management front. *File*

**SHALINI NAIR**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 1

THE social sector, comprising the Ministries of Women and Child Development (WCD), Urban and Rural Development and Social Justice saw the launch of many flagship schemes of the NDA government—some new, several repackaged. With just a year left for the completion of the tenure of this government, many of these missions may need to accelerate their pace greatly in order to meet their targets by election year.

#### WHAT'S DONE

A FLAGSHIP scheme to be launched by the WCD Ministry was *Beti Bachao Beti Pado*, aimed at multi-sectoral interventions to prevent gender-based sex selection and encourage female education. Despite the underutilisation of funds, the ministry has claimed much success in the scheme in terms of improving sex ratio at birth. However, only Census 2021 figures would be able to tell whether it has impacted the declining child sex ratio, which captures post-birth discrimination against the girl child.

Another focus has been women at workplace, be it through the setting up of internal complaint cells under the anti-sexual harassment legisla-

tion or increasing paid maternity leave period to 26 weeks. The Social Justice Ministry saw the passing of a couple of important legislation like the amended SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.

Barring the UPA's JNNURM, the urban development sector was largely left to the states (with land being a state subject). Perhaps for the first time, the Centre decided to take an active interest in urbanisation. Some UPA government schemes were tweaked, scaled up, and re-launched as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (housing), Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (infrastructure) and Swachh Bharat Mission. About 199 km of Metro line was commissioned in the last four years. An achievement of the Urban Affairs Ministry was the passage of Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act in the face of much opposition by the real estate sector. The rural counterpart has made significant strides in road construction and upgradation through Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), and official numbers show doubling of road length to 47,000 km over four years.

#### WHAT'S IN PROGRESS

WITH the BJP eyeing political dividends that could come its



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We have been responsible for amending the Prevention of Atrocities Act, which expanded the scope of acts identified as atrocities against SC/STs and enhanced the compensation amount for victims. There may have been a rise in atrocities but the government has also been serious about taking strict action against it. Our government has put in a lot of effort to construct and conserve Babasaheb Ambedkar memorials in Delhi, Mumbai and London

#### THE OPPOSITION VIEW



**"The biggest failing of the Social Justice Ministry has been that post-matric scholarships to the tune of Rs 9,000 crore have still not been released to SC students. It was only after the April 2 Bharat Bandh that the Centre filed its review petition on the amendments to the Prevention of Atrocities Act, but since then it has done nothing about issuing an ordinance"**

**PL PUNIA**, EX-CHAIRPERSON OF NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED CASTES AND CONGRESS RAJYA SABHA MEMBER

way by targeting subordinate OBC groups, the Union government has set up the OBC commission for sub-categorisation of the community, paving the way for quota within quota. The findings of this commission could be a game-changer for the BJP in the 2019 general elections in its agenda of undermining

the hold of regional parties on OBC communities, and in the face of the backlash from Dalit groups with the rise in atrocities and government's initial inaction over the amendments to the Prevention of Atrocities Act. An ordinance to secure the Atrocities Act might also be in the offing in case the ongoing

#### Physical achievement of PMGSY in terms of road length completed (in km)



#### Average road length constructed per day under PMGSY (in km)



case in the Supreme Court fails to yield the desired results.

As far as pending issues go, two significant Bills are those concerning rights of transgender persons and anti-human trafficking, as also the National Women's Policy. Other than the speedy toilet construction under Swachh Bharat Mission and road construction under PMGSY, most other projects are lagging behind their targets. For instance, the execution of the Smart City Mission so far shows that 80 per cent of the funds is flowing into less than 3 per cent of the area of the Smart City contenders. Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), less than 8 lakh houses have been constructed so far — not even 10 per cent of the target of providing 1.2 crore houses by 2022.

#### WHAT'S STUCK

TWO important Bills of the Narendra Modi government, one to grant constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes and the other to make triple talaq pronouncement a criminal offence, have seen a rocky journey so far

and are still awaiting passage in Parliament. The government's repeated emphasis on women's empowerment, especially that of Muslim women, rings hollow considering that the voices of survivors asking for criminalisation of marital rape and outlawing of female genital mutilation in the Bohra Muslim community have fallen on deaf ears, with the issues finally having to be taken to the judiciary. The same is true for decriminalisation of same-sex consensual relations.

The Swachh Bharat Mission, for all its claims, has failed to deliver much on the waste management front, be it expansion of the sewage network, developing landfills in cities, or in its complete neglect of its initially stated agenda of eradicating manual scavenging. In rural India, the Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana, wherein MPs were expected to adopt rural areas and turn them into model villages, has been largely a non-starter for lack of budgetary support, while the UPA's flagship rural livelihood scheme MNREGA has been repeatedly crippled by inadequate funds.