

# Rural job scheme Act to be amended to end wage disparity: Jairam Ramesh

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The Centre today said the MNREGA will be amended to end the disparity with minimum wages even as it issued a notification revising the wage rates under the employment guarantee scheme for all States and Union Territories in the new financial year.

The MNREGA wage rate is different in each State as it is linked to the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPIAL).

The Central government's decision assumes significance in view of the Supreme Court considering the Karnataka High Court verdict that the Central government is liable to pay higher wages under the programme in tandem with that of the State minimum wage rate.

The Rural Development

## Notification issued to revise wage rates

► The notification will be subject to the outcome of the Special Leave to Appeal pending before the Supreme Court.

Minister, Mr Jairam Ramesh, said the government is likely to bring an amendment to the MNREGA in the second part of the budget session to end the controversy over wage rate and minimum wage rate.

"We won't amend the Minimum Wage Act. We will amend the MNREGA and we will bring this amendment in this session of Parliament," the Minister, who tabled a statement regarding revision of MNREGA wage rate in Parliament, told reporters.

Mr Ramesh said the gov-

ernment had examined both options of amending Minimum Wage Act and amending MNREGA and "the weight of opinion is now that it is easier to amend MNREGA than to amend the minimum wages in order to ensure that there is no discrepancy between the two Bills."

"We are likely to introduce this amendment in the budget session of Parliament," he said.

Interestingly, the new wage rate that has been fixed for Karnataka (Rs 155) ex-

ceeds the minimum wage rate of Rs 145.58 of agriculture labourer in Karnataka.

"Without wishing to comment on the case that is currently sub judice in the Supreme Court, I want to say that with this revision the wage rate in Karnataka is higher than the minimum wage rate," Mr Ramesh said.

The MNREGA aims to provide a minimum of 100 days of work to poor rural households.

Mr Ramesh said the notification regarding the MNREGA wage rate would be subject to the outcome of the Special Leave to Appeal pending before the Supreme Court.

Noting that workers under MNREGA are entitled to ad-

ditional benefits which are not enjoyed by workers under minimum wages, Mr Ramesh said any family that has crossed 15 days of employment under the rural employment guarantee scheme in a year will automatically get enrolled in health insurance scheme Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana.

"It is not available to minimum wage worker," the Minister said listing other benefits, including provision for transportation allowance for a MNREGA worker who have to go beyond 5 km to get employment.

He also noted that the marginal farmers are allowed to work on their own land under MNREGA. "This is one major difference between minimum wage employment and MNREGA employment," he said.