Addressing Manual Scavenging

Why in news?

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The Madras High Court has directed the Central and the State governments to ensure the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.

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What was the case?

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- A petition was submitted claiming that around 30 persons engaged for manual scavenging in Tamil Nadu lost their lives.
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- The petitioner wanted the court to pass directions to the Union and the State government to identify families involved in manual scavenging and rehabilitate them.
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- Following this, the court noted that manual scavenging is a contravention of human rights and the right to live with dignity enshrined by the Constitution.
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- It also directed the Central and the State governments to ensure the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.
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What are the challenges in implementing?

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- Continuous presence of insanitary latrines.
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- Absence of a full census of both the latrines and the people engaged in clearing such waste.
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- Reduction of funds for the self-employment scheme by Centre, discouraging people to move away from scavenging.
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- Prevalence of social prejudice like regarding the inclusion of a sanitary toilet as physical pollution of the house and entrenched belief in the caste system
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What should be done?

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- The judiciary should fix responsibility on State governments.
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- It should order an accurate survey of the practice especially in those States that claim to have no insanitary latrines or manual scavenging.
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- Raising the confidence level among those engaged in manual cleaning is vital.
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- Empowerment and breaking caste barriers through education and economic uplift is the key.
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- Compensation sanctioned for the families of those who died should be paid immediately.
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What are the highlights of the Manual Scavenging Act, 2013?

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- The Bill prohibits the employment of manual scavengers, the manual cleaning of sewers and septic tanks without protective equipment, and the construction of insanitary latrines.
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- It seeks to rehabilitate manual scavengers and provide for their alternative employment.
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- Each local authority, cantonment board and railway authority is responsible for surveying insanitary latrines within its jurisdiction.
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- They shall also construct a number of sanitary community latrines.
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- Each occupier of insanitary latrines shall be responsible for converting or demolishing the latrine at his own cost.
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- If he fails to do so, the local authority shall convert the latrine and recover the cost from him.
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- The District Magistrate and the local authority shall be the implementing authorities.
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- Offences under the Bill shall be cognizable and non-bailable.
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Source: The Hindu

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