

NEW FOCUS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE TO UNDERPRIVILEGED

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Sentinels of social justice are always on toes, knowing fully well that if they lower guard, the damage will be collateral.

A nation of India's size and population was seized of the situation ever since it assumed power reins. The country underwent dramatic changes, but law makers and social justice torch bearers worked in tandem to evolve strategies to ensure social justice, sinking their ideological and political differences.

Policies and action plans framed to ensure justice to socially backward, economically poor, people with disabilities and old persons. On November 5, this year, the foundation stone for office building of the National Institute of Social Defence—an autonomous organisation, under the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry was laid. The Institute, in service for the nation since 1961, is the premier training institute providing services of human resource development, capacity building, research and documentation, in areas such as drug abuse prevention, senior citizens, prevention of beggary, and rehabilitation of destitute.

A woman with disability, Ira Singhal, topped All India Civil Services Examination last year, proving that with talent, despite physical disabilities, no social and bureaucratic hurdles are there to annex top slots. Her ascendancy to power corridors spoke volumes of opportunities available in the sound social set up, refined and groomed over the years.

Mr Thaawar Chand Gehlot, Union Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment, felicitated Ms Singhal and stated that she could be the Brand Ambassador for the Department for its schemes and programmes and her achievement shall inspire a whole generation of youth to come forward and achieve glorious heights. The Department of Empowerment of

Persons with disabilities in consultation with UPSC, SSC, UGC and other educational bodies will strive to ensure that the guidelines are such that they help and promote the cause of PWDs to achieve their inclusion, participation empowerment.

The Central government, in close coordination with state governments and UTs, have initiated a slew of schemes to herald a new era of justice and at times, affirmative actions are taken to safeguard the country's ideology of justice to all. Many rural schemes were launched by the Centre to guarantee minimum wages to rural folks by providing them employment under MGNREGA and successive government never tinkered with ambitious plans, which are being made more transparent with Digital India Campaign and linking payments to AADHAR cards and bank accounts.

Carrying forward the nation's social justice objective, the present government at the Centre in its first year of installation embarked on an active agenda for the scheduled castes. A new scheme of 'Venture capital fund for the Scheduled castes entrepreneurs' was launched with a capital of Rs 200 crore. The Scheme is being implemented through the Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI), Ltd. and the amount has been released to it.

The other scheme—Credit Enhancement Guarantee for the scheduled castes was announced by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his last General Budget (2014-15) and he said that a sum of Rs.200 crore will be released under the scheme to help start-up entrepreneurs, belonging to SC category, who inspire to be part of the neo-middle class category. The objective was to create jobs and instill confidence in the Scheduled Classes. The budget was approved.

As an integral part of the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan', launched by the Prime Minister on Gandhi Jayanti last year, the National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation, a public sector undertaking under the ministry, launched a new scheme 'Swachhta Udyami Yojana' for financing viable community toilets project and sanitation related vehicles to collect garbage.

The Government also enhanced grant in aid for the voluntary organisations working for the SCs. It was last fixed in 1998. The scheme was communicated to states and UTs- generally it is 100 per cent enhancement and honorarium to teachers has been revised upwards at par with salary of teachers in the Kasturba Gandhi Vidyalaya.

The Government has also revised the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules 1995. It has also notified revision in rates of compensation- between Rs 75,000 to Rs 7,50,000-depending on the nature of offences.

The Government has revised norms for the **Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana** -additional 1,500 villages are to be covered and these to be selected by the Ministry of SJ&E. The villages, suffering from natural disasters like floods, droughts, excessive rains, man-made calamities like arson and social disparities targeted towards members of the SC community.

The scheme covers all states having 1000 or more SC majority villages. the newly covered states are Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, MP, Karantaka, Punjab, Uttrakhand, Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

In another major initiative, The Government rechristened name of a scheme as Pre-Matric Scholarship to the Children of those engaged in occupations involving cleaning and prone to health hazards. Earlier, it was known as pre matric scholarship to those engaged in "unclean occupations".

The Central sector scheme -"National Overseas Scholarship for the Scheduled castes has been revised by increasing the number of wards from 60 to 100 with effect from the selection year 2014-15.

Paying glowing tributes to iconic Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the Government has approved setting up of the "Dr Ambedkar International Centre for Social Justice" at an expenditure of Rs.196 crore at Janpath, New Delhi. The architectural plan and

design of the centre has been approved by the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC).

Likewise, saluting Dr. Ambedkar's vision for social justice, the government has decided to fully develop the Dr. Ambedkar Memorial with an estimated cost of Rs.100 crore at 26, Alipur Road in the national capital. The CPWD has started the preliminary work and the architectural plan has been approved by SAJ&E Ministry.

Plans are afoot to enhance the authorized capital of the National Scheduled castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) from Rs. 1000 crore to Rs.2000 crore.

The Scheme of special central Assistance (SCP) to SC sub plan (SCSP) is under overhauling with enhancement in subsidy amount from Rs 10,000 to Rs. 50,000 per beneficiary and structural changes.

Under paraphernalia of social justice and to bring under it, a number of plans are under implementation. Recently, after successful seven months training of 250 women safai karmachari and their dependence as commercial motor driver, 30 women were given job/ placement letters by Sh. Gehlot, SJE Minister. Another batch of 250 such women has started training by Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NFDC) under skill development programme of the Ministry.

Awarding the placement letters to the women from Safai Karamcharis families, the Minister said there was the urgent need to provide skill development training particularly to the children of safai karmacharis and manual scavengers who, so far have remained engaged only in sanitation related occupations.

The women beneficiaries are set to create an environment of safety for women in the cities. The Ministry is of the view that such training programmes should also be started in other big cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Bengaluru etc.

Discussions are underway between NSFDC and taxi aggregators, School van operators, Resident Welfare Associations etc. for exploring employment opportunities for the trained women drivers seeking job employment.

An MoU was executed between NSFDC and Apollo MedSkills as training partner for training of

safai Karamcharis/ manual scavengers and their dependents in various medical related trades and their placements in various hospitals etc. A tripartite agreement was also signed among NSKFDC, HIMCOM and Azad Foundation for Job/ Self Employment of 90 trainees of commercial motor driving.

The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has organized White Cane Day on October 15 to sensitize the common man about the challenges being faced by visually challenged people.

There are over 16 million blind and 28 million visually impaired people in India who are often marginalized in terms of education opportunities, career opportunities or social standing as compared to their sighted counterparts. Due to lack of access to information, they are often unable to lead fulfilling, independent, economic and socially productive lives.

In a related development, the SJE Ministry opened the new production facility for producing affordable state-of-art lower limb prosthetic systems at Kanpur. The Estimated cost of the project is Rs. 6 crore.

It is to be noted that, under the 'Make In India' initiative of the Prime Minister, Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO) working under the aegis of Department of Empowerment

of Person with Disability (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE), inked the Transfer of Technology (ToT) and Technical & Consultancy Services agreement with multinational company Ottobock for mass manufacturing of new generation lower limb prosthetic systems for PwDs (Persons with Disabilities) in the country, at affordable price.

With this new production unit ALIMCO will be able to produce technologically advanced prosthetic system which will improve the independence and mobility of lower limbs amputees from all sections of society in the country.

The Government has approved the setting up of Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC) as a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860. The ISLRTC will be under the aegis of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment. It shall be located initially at the Institute for Physically Handicapped, New Delhi. This decision will help the five million deaf community of the country. It shall provide for increased accessibility for the hearing impaired in education, in the workplace and in all activities of public life.

(The author is a senior journalist with UNI, New Delhi)

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