

Govt fails to implement pension enhancement order for handicapped

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SRINAGAR, Dec 7: Over nine months have passed since the Government announced increase in the monthly pension of severe physically challenged persons but the order has not been implemented so far due to “non-availability” of funds.

The State’s Finance Minister Haseeb Drabu had made the announcement in previous budget session of State Assembly on March 25 regarding increase of Rs 600 in the monthly pension of the handicapped. The State Government has been providing social security pension to many underprivileged sections of society and persons with disabilities get Rs 400 per month pension under Integrated Social Security Scheme.

However, the new budget session is approaching but the order has not been implemented, drawing flak from the disabled persons of the State. Sources said that the Finance Department has no funds as of now to pay enhanced pension to the disabled.

As per 2011 census, the State has around 3.6 lakh persons with disabilities. However various researches depict that the State has around 6 lakh persons with disabilities with 1.2 lakh orthopaedic disable persons and around 90000 persons facing mild to severe types of mental illness disabilities, said a prominent disability activist, Javed Ahmad Tak, whose contributions in upliftment of physically challenged were even hailed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his ‘Mann Ki Baat’ radio programme.

Expressing dismay over the non-implementation of the order, Tak said it depicts the “non-serious” attitude of the Government. “A month ago we met Finance Minister regarding the matter but he told us that they don’t have funds as now. We will release it once the funds would be available,” he said.

The handicapped persons who spoke to Excelsior lamented the Government for non-implementation of the order. “It is ironical that the Government cannot even pay us meagre amount of Rs 1,000 per month. We have been already ignored by the government in various sectors. They should release funds on priority basis,” said Abdul Wahid, a handicapped person hailing from Srinagar outskirts. The disabled persons are also demanding that the criteria for getting enhanced pension should be above 40 percent disability instead of 60.

Besides, the severe physically challenged persons also demanded increase in the pension of severe at par with other States of the country. “In many States the social security pension is around Rs 1000 in case of mild to moderate type of disabled people but in case of severe disable people the social security pension amount is Rs 2000 in order to meet various medical and social needs,” said Tak, who runs a middle school for disabled children in south Kashmir’s Bijbehara Township of Anantnag district, adding “in upcoming budget the State should allocate funds for disabled separately.”

Despite repeated attempts, neither Finance Minister nor Minister of State (MoS) Social Welfare could be reached for their comments.

However, Director Social Welfare, Hashmat Ali Yattoo said that the process to implement the order is underway and it would be taken to its logical end soon. "There are certain things which we need to sort out before disbursement of funds. We will not deprive the deserving handicapped persons from their pension and the order would be implemented soon," he said.