

Kashmir

Govt committed for welfare of specially abled persons: Sakina

KT NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, Dec 1: Minister for Social Welfare, Sakina Ittoo has called upon the prosperous persons of the society to come forward and contribute in an organised way for the welfare of specially abled persons, adding that they are part of all belong to our society. She said government is committed to provide all possible assistances to these persons and efforts are on to ensure their rehabilitation.

The Minister was speaking at a function organised at SIE Srinagar to observe the World Disabled Day. The function was jointly organised by Directorate of Social Welfare and Humanity Welfare Organisation Helpline, Bijbehara Anantnag.

Sakina said that there are 304000 disabled people registered to whom department of social welfare is providing monthly pension. She said during 2011-12, Social Welfare Department distributed Rs. 34 crore among concerned beneficiaries.

The Minister also informed that wheel chair, hearing aid and artificial limbs worth Rs. 19 lakh have also been provided to the concerned beneficiaries.

The function among others was attended by Director Social Welfare, Bashir Ahmad Bhat, Principal SIE, Parveen Pandit, District Social Welfare Officer, Srinagar and a large number of disabled persons.

Sakina sought cooperation from civil society for empowering specially able persons. Kashmir

Dec 1, 2011

SRINAGAR: The Minister for Social Welfare, Ms. Sakina Itoo today assured the socially abled community that Government is committed to redress their grievances and have launched several schemes for their welfare.

The Minister was addressing a gathering of specially abled persons held today at SKICC Srinagar at a function which was organized by Humanity Welfare Organization Helpline, Bijbehara, supported by Child Rights and You (CRY), MD, Hotel Residency MS Mall and other agencies. The theme of the function was “No discrimination but Inclusion”.

The Minister sought the help of the people particularly civil society senior citizens, for empowering this section as they are the part and parcel of the society. Highlighting the importance of organising such programmes she said that they provide opportunity to know the problems of this section and we as the part of the government and civil society must play our role in this direction, the Minister said. Appreciating the efforts of the organiser for making such awareness conferences, the Minister said that they are doing a great human service to the mankind. She said that all the human being are equal before the Almighty and we must respect them wholeheartedly so that they may not feel isolated. Ms. Sakina said that she has already issued direction to the officers of the social welfare department to listen the problems of these people humbly and redress their grievances on priority basis. Referring of providing RAMPS and installation of lifts in the government institutions, Ms. Sakina said the directions have already been issued to these institutions including R&B for ensuring lift facility so that they may not suffer during their visit. She asked all the agencies for close coordination between them so that benefits could reach to this section and said there are already a good number of schemes in pipeline for the benefit of the disabled people which are being implemented. On this occasion, Ms. Sakina said that under ISSS 68072 disabled people have been covered and under Indira Gandhi National Disabled Pension Scheme, Rs. 28 lakh have been released during 2010-11. She also said that Rs. 26 lakh pre-matric scholarship and Rs

19 lakh post-matric scholarship have been provided to the students belonging to this section.

The Minister appealed to the common people to come forward for empowering them so that they may live with dignity and honour.

Addressing the gathering, District and Sessions Judge, Ms. Kaneez Fatima said that these children have extra ordinary qualities but we must encourage them for achieving excellence in life.

Earlier, the students presented a cultural programme and awards were presented to the students, concerned officers and agencies for the contribution of their cause. Director Social Welfare and other senior officers present on the occasion.



The Blind too have their rights, Can't You See!

Jan 15, 1:48 pm

Srinagar, Jan 15 (ANI): On 4th January, hundreds of people gathered at the Press Enclave in Srinagar to protest for their rights. Nothing unusual for a city that holds a history of protests except that carrying placards in their hands, but this time, the group

was of visually challenged people driven by an impetus to make the state government "watch" their plight.

It was in the year 1829 that the first ever Braille book was published after the name of its inventor Louis Braille who lost his eyesight at the age of 3. It was his gift to thousands of people around the world to feel the joy of reading despite being blind. Today, the Braille, Daisy Formats, audio software integrated with Information communication technology [ICT] has carved a less difficult road for the blind people to read and write.

However, that road has been unable to reach the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir where on the occasion of International Day for the Rights, in spite of celebrating the day, the disabled community is carrying out protests for simple demands like introducing Braille in schools and making public places blind friendly by installing Braille sign boards.

As per Census 2001, out of the total 3,02,670 disabled persons in J and K, 2,08,713 face visual disability. The 2011 census report on disability is expected to be more alarming and astonishing. The ten years of hard work invested by WHO in the global initiative "Vision 2020: the Right to Sight" to achieve zero blindness up to the year 2020, seems to hold no good in J and K where there is an overall paucity of eye hospitals.

The situation is worst in the interiors where hospitals and primary health centres fail to serve the needs of the visually challenged by not offering standard ophthalmic check-ups. Lack of infrastructure at the district hospitals is a major drawback that doesn't allow doctors to perform critical surgeries. Fear of heavy debts inhibits poor patients to consider private hospitals as an option for corrective medical care. They prefer to remain blind.

In a recent disability assessment camps organised by Department of Education under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan funding for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) component, out of around 8000 children with special needs in a district, more than 3000 were found to be suffering from visual impairments. With each day passing by, the situation of children with low vision problems is deteriorating and they have started getting themselves enlisted in the record of blind people. Azima, a student of Class 9 in the educational zone Anantnag, needs corneal transplantation to maintain her vision. Since

there are no separate schools in the state where Braille education system exists, she is forced to struggle with the conventional black board education and is therefore losing her sight.

Except for a few special schools where a handful of children with blindness seek education with the help of Braille slates, Jammu and Kashmir is among the few states, which are yet to introduce Braille technique of education in the schools.

Education is one aspect of development the visually disabled are demanding; but more fundamental is the very basic right to live, live with dignity, which certainly isn't true in the remote villages of the state.

Aisha and Khadija (names changed) hail from a small hamlet in Anantnag and today after spending 30 years of their life in darkness, both are awaiting death.No doctor advised our parents to rehabilitate us," said Khadija.

"I have developed diabetes sitting at home. We are not allowed to go out and always face discrimination by our family members and relatives. For them we are the blind people," said Aisha, who firmly believes that if provided, vocational training can make both of them self- reliant.

Seeing the situation of 'Abhinanda Home' located in the heart of the city - Solina, Srinagar, one can understand the plight of the disabled lot for whose service this home was created. It is the only school for deaf and mute students, now on the verge of closure.

Various Ministers, during their visit to the place, announced grants for the school but did not bother to keep track of the situation thereafter.

The school compound, already encroached by security forces, is full of trenches and not looked after. A few ruined buildings and untidy rooms house deaf and mute children accompanied by some normal children from poor families. The conversion of the special school into an inclusive school does not reflect the principle of inclusion in any manner; it is merely a means of collecting some revenue to pay the teachers there.

A few rooms are occupied by some blind adults who were earlier trained in Braille, besides learning how to make chairs and chinks. With no means of earning a livelihood with such out of date skills, the blind people are only fed there as dependents without any future career planning. It would have been better if the Social Welfare or education department of the state had adopted the school and provided special education for deaf, mute and blind students there.

despite the darkness, there are a few responsible groups, which have taken on the onus of becoming the beacon of light for the visually challenged people. Yasmeena, 38, of Chee, Anantnag, is an artisan by profession responsible for feeding herself and her old-aged widow mother.

Today with the help of Zaiba Appa Institute of Inclusive Education, Bijbehara, she along with others, government school dropouts, are now pursuing their education with the help of Braille system and computer education with Jaws software facility.

A rally organised by the NGO Humanity Welfare Organization Helpline along with the Zaiba Appa Institute of Inclusive Education, was an initiative to raise unheard voices for a system where each and every individual is provided a platform to realise their potential and become independent on the basis of their special talent.

"We do not need government sympathy but want protection of our rights in the society. No worry that we are deaf, dumb and blind: we can sustain our lives with dignity," says one of the protestors, clearly reflecting the respect and place they seek within society.

The rally and the strong voices that created uproar in the region have started fading away. Next year the crowd will gather again, probably with an upsurge in the numbers of the visually challenged reflecting how much attention the caretakers of the public have devoted to the disabled lot. Donations and sympathy won't take away the blame.

The Charkha Development Communication network feels that the answer would be to provide them with equal opportunities to explore their hidden qualities. This will not only empower them, but will guarantee a clear vision much needed to create an unbiased society. By Javed Ahmad Tak(ANI)

