

REHABILITATION OF BONDED LABOURERS

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(The Bonded Labour System has been abolished by law throughout the country with effect from 25th October, 1975. This was later replaced by the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. As and when existence of bonded labour is detected, such persons are identified for rehabilitation. Under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 identification, release and rehabilitation of freed bonded labour is the direct responsibility of the concerned States/Union Territories.

Under the Act, the District Magistrates and Sub-Divisional Magistrates have been entrusted with certain duties/responsibilities. To assist the District/Sub-divisional Magistrates in discharge of their statutory duties, Vigilance Committees are constituted at district and sub-divisional level. Further, the Act also empowers Executive Magistrates to exercise powers of Judicial Magistrate of first or second class for trial of offences.

In order to assist the States/UTs in their task of rehabilitation of released bonded labourers, the Ministry of Labour & Employment was implementing a Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer-2016, which was revamped with effect from 27.01.2022 and is henceforth known as Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer-2021. This scheme is demand driven where funds are provided to States/UTs on receipt of proposal from them. Further, the funds are transferred by the State/UT Government to the concerned District for the purpose of the Bonded Labourer Rehabilitation Scheme. The salient features of the scheme are as follows:

- The State Governments are not required to pay any matching contribution for the purpose of cash rehabilitation assistance.
- It provides for immediate financial assistance up to Rs.30,000/- for each case of rehabilitation.
- Rehabilitation assistance to the tune of Rs.1.00 lakh, Rs.2.00 lakh and Rs.3.00 lakh is provided to rescued bonded labourers based on their category and level of exploitation upon proof of bondage.
- The Scheme also provides for financial assistance of Rs.4.50 lakh once in three years per sensitive district, Rs. 1.50 lakh for Evaluatory studies (maximum of five Evaluatory Studies per year) and Rs.10 lakhs per State per annum for Awareness Generation.
- A Bonded Labour Rehabilitation Fund is required to be created at the District level by each State/UT with a permanent corpus of at least Rs. 10 lakhs. This fund is utilised for extending immediate financial assistance to the released bonded labourers.

Moreover, to ensure timely disbursement of financial aid to the rescued labourers, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for identification and rescue of bonded labourers and prosecution of offender has been framed and issued to all the State Governments for strengthening the prosecution machinery. Regular sensitization programmes and coordination with the field level functionaries such as District Magistrate/Superintendent of Police/Labour Department officials at the district and state level are held under the aegis of National Human Rights Commission, State Human Rights Commissions for improving the conviction rate in such cases.

This information was given by the Union Minister of Labour and Employment, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha today.

MG/DK

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