



“When Equal Opportunities Are Provided, Talent Knows No Boundaries”: Dr Virendra Kumar, Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment Calls Divya Kala Mela a Movement for Self-Reliance and Inclusive Nation-Building

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"When equal opportunities are provided, talent knows no boundaries." With this powerful message, the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, **Dr Virendra Kumar**, inaugurated the **31st Divya Kala Mela** at Ravindra Sadan, Kolkata today, describing it as far more than an exhibition—it is a national movement that transforms confidence into capability, creativity into livelihoods and aspiration into self-reliance for Divyangjan. He said that the Mela embodies Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of **"Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas"**, ensuring that persons with disabilities become equal partners in the journey towards an **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

Addressing the gathering, Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment said that the **31st Divya Kala Mela**, being organised in Kolkata from **14–22 July 2026**, marks a historic milestone as it is being held for the first time through the joint efforts of the **Government of India and the Government of West Bengal**. Conceived in **December 2022**, the initiative has now expanded across the country—from **Srinagar to Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi to Guwahati, and Ahmedabad to Patna**—providing a dedicated national platform for Divyang artisans and entrepreneurs. Featuring around **40 stalls**, predominantly by artisans from West Bengal, the eight-day Mela enables Divyang entrepreneurs to access markets across India and beyond, while fostering confidence, dignity and economic independence.

The Minister reiterated that the Government's approach towards persons with disabilities has undergone a transformational shift from a welfare-based model to a rights-based empowerment framework. He informed that since **2014**, financial assistance of nearly **₹1,462 crores** has been extended to around **1.82 lakh Divyang beneficiaries** to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship. He also highlighted the **National Overseas Scholarship Scheme**, under which **20 students with disabilities** are selected every year for higher education abroad. Referring to the distribution of assistive devices during the event, he said these are not merely aids but instruments of dignity and independence.

He also underscored the significance of the **NAMASTE Scheme**, which promotes mechanised sanitation, provides PPE kits, safety training, health insurance and financial assistance for sanitation workers, reaffirming the Government's commitment to ensuring dignity, safety and social security for those serving society.

Speaking on the occasion, Smt. Agnimitra Paul **Minister-in-Charge of Urban Development and Municipal Affairs** in the Government of West Bengal, described the Divya Kala Mela as a celebration of dignity, creativity, self-respect and inclusive development rather than merely an exhibition. She said the

initiative offers a vital platform for Divyang artisans, craftsmen and entrepreneurs to showcase their products and strengthen their economic self-reliance. Reaffirming the commitment of the Government of West Bengal to the principle that no one should be left behind, she highlighted the State's initiatives in education, healthcare, social security, skill development, assistive devices, disability-friendly infrastructure and employment for persons with disabilities. She also thanked the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for organising the event and expressed confidence that stronger Centre-State cooperation would further strengthen inclusive development.

Paying heartfelt tribute to sanitation workers, Smt. Paul described them as the true guardians of public health and highlighted the objectives of the **NAMASTE** programme in ensuring their dignity, safety, skill development and socio-economic well-being. She announced the distribution of the "**Dr. Kavach**" safety kit, comprising a raincoat, cap, gloves, boots and protective mask, and called upon society to judge persons with disabilities by their abilities and contributions rather than their limitations. "Divyangjan are not objects of charity but equal partners in the progress of the State and the nation," she said.

Smt. Malati Rava Roy, Minister of State (Independent Charge) Women and Child Development and Social Welfare, West Bengal described the Divya Kala Mela as a flagship initiative of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment that has emerged as a powerful instrument for the economic empowerment and social inclusion of Divyangjan. She said the Mela provides a dedicated platform for artisans and entrepreneurs with disabilities to showcase and market their handicrafts, artworks and other products, thereby enhancing their livelihoods, confidence and dignity. She added that the cultural performances by Divyang artists reinforce the message that physical limitations can never restrict talent, creativity or excellence, inspiring society to become more inclusive, compassionate and sensitive.

In his welcome address, **Shri Rajiv Sharma, Joint Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD)**, said that the **31st Divya Kala Mela** marks the first joint initiative of the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal for the empowerment of Divyangjan. The formal vote of thanks was delivered by **Dr. Sandeep Rathor, Joint Secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment**.

The **Divya Kala Mela** continues to provide a prestigious national platform for showcasing the extraordinary artistic talents of Divyang performers.

The event also highlighted the remarkable achievements of the **NAMASTE (National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem) Scheme**. Across the country, **89,915 Sewer and Septic Tank Workers** and **2,81,117 Waste Pickers** have been validated. States and Union Territories have been provided **87,037 PPE kits** for Sewer and Septic Tank Workers and **1,84,118 PPE kits** for Waste Pickers. Additionally, **Health Cards** have been issued to **76,845 Sewer and Septic Tank Workers** and **1,04,729 Waste Pickers**, while **753 Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs)** have been equipped with modern safety devices. During the programme, PPE kits and Ayushman Cards were distributed to sanitation workers, reaffirming the Government's unwavering commitment to ensuring their safety, dignity, health and social security while promoting mechanised sanitation and strengthening collaboration among States, Urban Local Bodies and implementing agencies to realise the vision of an inclusive, empowered and self-reliant India.

The dignitaries were present in 31st Divya Kala Mela were, Shri Ram Das Athwale, Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, Shri Umesh Rai, Hon'ble Minister of State of Urban Development and Municipal Affairs, West Bengal, Secretary, Women and Child etc.
