

Centre sits on relief scheme for rape victims

Piyasree Dasgupta : Kolkata, Sat Feb 18 2012, 02:26 hrs

Amid a raging debate over the alleged Park Street rape, the Centre continues to sit on a scheme developed by the National Commission of Women (NCW) to grant compensation to rape victims.

The NCW submitted the final draft of The Financial Assistance and Support Services to Victims of Rape: A Scheme for Restorative Justice to the Ministry of Women and Child Development at the Centre in April 2010.

The scheme was planned in addition to Section 357A of the CrPC through which a victim can claim compensation from the state.

Following a Supreme Court writ petition in 1994, which directed the NCW to develop a scheme and set up a Criminal Injuries Compensation Board to provide financial assistance to victims of rape, the commission initiated the process of drafting the scheme in 1995. In 2005, the government provided the commission with guidelines on planning a procedure to disburse funds to victims. The scheme provides for setting up of a National Criminal Injuries Relief and Rehabilitation Board, which will have counterparts in each state and districts in the respective states. Under the scheme, the victim is entitled to restorative financial support adding up to Rs 2-3 lakh. According to it, victims who have lodged an FIR after the scheme comes to effect will be eligible for compensation from the government.

The secretary or additional secretary of the ministry of women and child development should be appointed as the chairperson of the national commission as mandated by the scheme.

Anita Agnihotri, member secretary of the NCW, said the commission had sent the final draft of the scheme on April 16, 2010. The ministry sent their suggestions, and the final submission of the draft with the NCW's recommendations was made in August that year.

"We have done whatever was required of us to do in drafting and planning the scheme. The draft has been submitted to the government and its implementation is their responsibility," said Agnihotri.

Asked why the scheme had taken so long to materialise, Agnihotri said, "Most of the present members of the commission assumed their office only in 2011. It is difficult to comment on what happened prior to that." She, however, added that the NCW had been made to understand that the scheme had been included in the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012).

Given that the tenure of the 11th plan draws to an end next month, when asked about the time of the scheme's launch, Agnihotri said, "It shouldn't take a lot of time. The draft was submitted a while back. The government is looking into it."

Officials of the Ministry for Women and Child Sevelopment were not available to comment on the matter. Sunanda Mukherjee, chairperson of the State Commission for Women, said she had no information or formal intimation of any such scheme yet.

In figures compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2010 alone, the number of rape cases registered under Section 376 of the IPC was 22, 172. "Most women are not aware of compensation schemes. And the compensation, according to the existent scheme, is paltry. It is very important to implement the new one," said a representative of Swayam, a women's rights organisation in the city.