

Scheme for rape victims bogged down for years

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It is mired in procedural wrangle

Even as the Union government scrambles to assuage angry crowds protesting against the December 16 gang-rape of a Delhi woman, it continues to sit on a draft scheme submitted by the National Commission for Women in 2010 that seeks to provide financial help and support to rape victims.

The scheme, circulated to the States for implementation on their own, is bogged down in procedural confusion. For, many are waiting for the Centre to notify the scheme so that a financial provision for it can be made in their annual plans.

This, when the Supreme Court, in 1994, directed the NCW to evolve a “scheme to wipe out the tears of unfortunate victims of rape.” The apex court had observed that it was necessary to set up a criminal injuries compensation board, as rape victims, besides suffering mental anguish, frequently incur substantial financial loss.

The Scheme for Relief and Rehabilitation of Victims of Rape, 2005 envisages constitution of boards headed by the district magistrate, in every district. The board is to decide, among other things, on giving a restorative relief of Rs. 2 lakh to Rs. 3 lakh within 60 days of the registration of first information report. An interim relief of Rs. 20,000 is to be provided within 15 days.

In Haryana, which was rocked by a series of rape cases in the last few months, activists found that copies of the scheme were circulated to deputy commissioners, but it was a dud, as there is no financial provision for it.

Well-placed sources in the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development told *The Hindu* that under the Supreme Court guidelines, States were duty-bound to formulate their own schemes for relief and rehabilitation of rape victims and that the draft scheme did not stop them from doing so. On why the Centre had not taken steps to notify the scheme so far, the sources said there was no consensus in the Planning Commission on funding the same. So, many States did not implement it as they were reluctant to fund the scheme on their own. Now the Planning Commission had agreed to fund it for women from BPL (below poverty line) families and single women, which meant the scheme could roll out by year-end.

The Ministry is also exploring the possibility of sharing the expenditure, with the Centre bearing the major cost and the States shouldering some part of it, to motivate them to adopt it. The NCW, on the advice of a committee of secretaries, had proposed to transfer the budgetary requirements for the scheme to the States as Grant-in-Aid. The scheme is to be monitored by the NCW itself.

Says Jagmati Sangwan, general secretary of the All India Democratic Women’s Association, which has been following up on getting assistance for 20 rape victims in Haryana from September: “We find that since most victims are poor, they are unable to continue their legal

struggle or look after their medical requirements in the absence of aid. Women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes do get Rs. 60,000 as there is a provision for them under the SC and ST Act, but for women from other castes who are poor, it is a dead end.”

Senior officers in Haryana, who have been working to provide some succour to the victims in the State, believe that often a scheme like this is sought to be derailed using the bogey of it being misused. The whole societal system was coming in the way to deny relief to the women victims of social violence, they said.

Dec. 27 2012