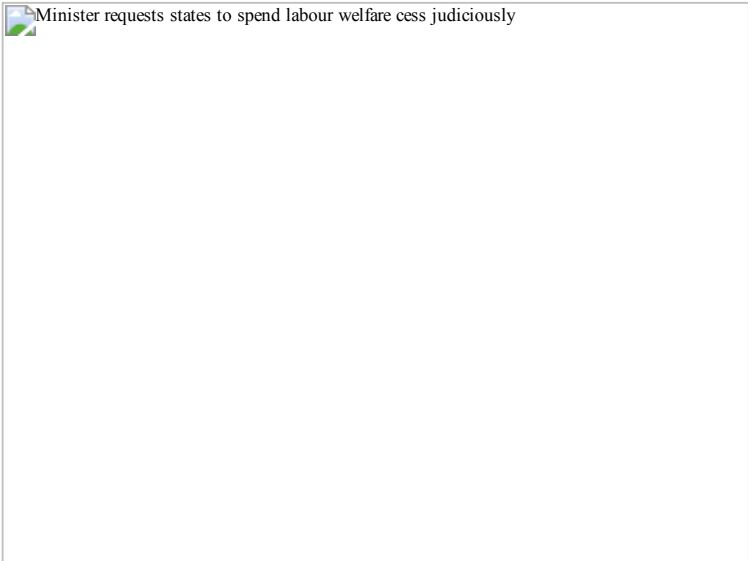


# Minister requests states to spend labour welfare cess judiciously

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**B**HUBANESWAR: Union labour minister Bandaru Dattatreya on Tuesday expressed displeasure over poor spending of 'labour welfare cess' by state governments as around Rs 22,000 crore are lying unspent with different states.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the two-day national labour conference here, Dattatreya said as Supreme Court has made a strong observation over poor spending of cess amount, "I request all states to utilize the amount judiciously for overall development of the construction workers."

"Of the total collected cess amount of Rs 27, 886 crores, spending by different state government is pegged at only Rs 5,800 crore. The Odisha government has spent only Rs 120 crore against the collection of Rs 940 crore.

Dattatreya also took a potshot at some state governments including Odisha for diverting the cess amount to other sectors and also for providing freebies like cycle from the welfare fund.

"The apex court has asked the Centre that the amount must be spent only for education, health care needs, social security, skill development and insurance of the construction workers and their family members. So, states need to take care of construction workers accordingly," he said.

Under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996, real estate developers have to pay 1 per cent of the total cost of construction of the building as cess. The cess is levied to augment resources of the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board.

Unveiling the Modi government's ambitious step, the Union labour minister said that the Centre aims to cover around 5 crore workers, engaged in unorganized sectors, under the umbrella of Employee's State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), that would guarantee socio-economic protection to the workers.

"We are also in the process of including auto-rickshaw drivers, rickshaw pullers, ASHA, Anganwadi and mid-day meal workers under ESIC in a phased manner," he said adding to encourage of women employment maternity leave period has been extended from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.

Stating that the existing labour laws in India are old and 'cumbersome' in nature, Dattatreya said these laws need to be tuned with present time. "The NDA government is in a process of reforming the laws in four codes—wage, industrial relations, social security and safety, working condition and health. The labour ministry has already discussed the issue with trade unions and I hope the code of wages and industrial relations will be introduced in the next session of the Parliament," he added.

Chief minister Naveen Patnaik, who inaugurated the conference, said the state government has so far registered 16 lakh workers with the Odisha Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board and targets to register at least 25 lakh by March, 2017.

Naveen said Odisha is one of the best states in terms of expenditure of cess as the state government spends Rs 200 crore from total collection of Rs 1000 crore by September.