

Business Standard

NHRC to organise two-day seminar on bonded labour

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The National Human Rights Commission will discuss the prevalence of bonded labour and challenges involved in its elimination during a two-day seminar here.

The 'National Seminar on Bonded Labour', starting tomorrow, is being organised after the rights body received a spate of complaints on the issue.

It will be followed by organising regional workshops on the subject by the Commission in various parts of the country.

Chairperson of NHRC Justice H L Dattu will inaugurate the event while Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ministry of Labour and Employment, Bandaru Dattatreya will be the chief guest, an NHRC statement said today.

The event would be held at Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, Teen Murti Bhawan here.

"The seminar is divided into three thematic sessions, which will be chaired by Justice D Murugesan, Member, NHRC. These will cover various aspects related to the prevalence of bonded labour and challenges in its elimination, relief and rehabilitation of the rescued bonded labourers in different parts of the country as well as international best practices on sustainable human development and bonded labour," it said.

These will be addressed, among others, by eminent speakers including those from International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), experts, representatives of central and state governments, civil society, NGOs, NHRC officers and Special Rapporteurs as well as the representatives of State Human Rights Commissions.

"The Commission has been receiving spate of complaints from time to time regarding exploitation and harassment of persons who have been victims of bonded labour system some of these complaints related to non-payment of wages or payment of wages lower than notified minimum wages," it said.

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, does not permit any compounding of the offence or reaching a compromise between the bonded labour keeper and the bonded labourer.

"The action and conduct of DMs in a large number of cases would amount to abatement of an offence as defined in Section 20 of the Act.

"The DMs are, however, not sufficiently aware of the provisions of the law (including case laws) and have treated the entire issue rather casually and half-heartedly," the NHRC said.

In most cases of bonded labour, there is "no clear, authentic and proof of settlement of wages". Vigilance committees at the district and sub-divisional levels are "not being re-constituted" after expiry of two years, it said.

"There is no simultaneity in release and rehabilitation of freed bonded labourers and repeatedly emphasises by the Supreme Court. There is no institutional mechanism for ventilation and redressal of grievances of freed bonded labourers," the Commission said.