Unorganised workers deprived of basic amenities

Staff Reporter

The condition of unorganised workers worsened as the government failed to recognise even their basic human rights, forget the legal rights. Unfortunately, 93 per cent of the workforce which is in the unorganised sector and is a major vote bank has been deprived of the basic amenities mainly due to exploitative nature of the ruling National Alliance for People's Movement (NAPM) leader and champion of Narmada Bachao Andolan, Medha Patkar.

Patkar was speaking at the concluding function of the three-day National Convention on Social Security for Unorganised Workers. Minister for Tribal Welfare Chaturvedi was the chief guest.

Lamenting the negligent attitude of the government, she said that the basic of 135,000 people are perennially neglected for the benefit of builders and multinational companies. She said that the situation of unorganised workers with all the privileges given by workers' representatives could be placed in the Parliament in the budget session. This will initiate debate on the issue and problems of vast majority of economically weaker sections of the society can be raised.

Patkar said that the condition of agriculture workers in the rural areas and slum dwellers in the urban areas is almost similar. Why politicians are not paying attention to the issues of this vast vote bank? She asked. Patkar raised the slogan of 'Gandhi ka shram kita, lok kitna, bhiroo na, bhiroo na' from madas and was immediately supported by the participants of the three-day convention. Patkar said that even for basic human rights for these workers are taken into consideration, there will be no fund for any subsidy, Special Economic Zones and even reservations.

She said that the wage policy of the government has been unreasonable and divided the society. Even the exercise of one worker was under Employment Guarantee Scheme is not good. Changes in labour legislation is on the cards, but the workers in unorganised sector have lost hope that it would benefit them, she said.

Patkar said that they are not against industrialisation. But, it should not pill big business sitting in the country. The industry should be able to generate employment and the workers should get their rights. She supported the private-public partnership, she said that it should not be defined as partnership of government with private business organisations. It should instead be government and people partnership so that the ventures could be oriented towards welfare of all.

Medha Patkar speaking at the concluding function of the three-day National Convention on Social Security for Unorganised Workers, while other dignitaries look on.

SEZs will hit farmers the most

Staff Reporter

The manner in which the Special Economic Zones are being planned and sanctioned, the workers and farmers will be the worst sufferers. These zones have become 'Special Exploitation Zones' instead, said champion of Narmada Bachao Andolan Medha Patkar.

Patkar was here to attend the concluding function of National Convention for Social Security for Unorganised Workers on Saturday.

Talking to reporters, she said that the court is being moved against the decision of the government taken for sanctioning the SEZs. She said that government has taken steps to grant tax concessions of Rs. 1 lakh crore for the SEZs. However, it has not been able to formulate policy for the welfare of its own farmers and workers. These unorganised workers are committing suicides and the government is unable to make plans even to meet their basic needs, she said.

The SEZs were sanctioned without taking farmers into confidence. The 74th and 75th amendments to the Constitution have been rendered meaningless by the representatives of people and people workers should be taken into confidence before planning any SEZ. These SEZs should be sanctioned only through democratic process of approval at Gram Sabha, Mahalla Samiti, etc., Special Export Zones should also be evaluated on issues like employment generation, migrated profit, benefits to local people, etc. The taxation policy should also be reviewed for these zones.

She said that the ongoing agitation against these SEZs in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan will continue.

The NAPM has planned a novel way to protest this government policy by organising an exhibition at Gandhi Smarak Ashram, near Rajghat, Delhi on November 14 and 15. The exhibition is a kind of 'satyagraha' and is called 'Action 2007'. Land, water, electricity, forests and meadows are the only at throw away price, she said.

Patkar said that the national movement is being planned for urgent (Cited on page 5).