

**A Press Statement circulated by Shri Ram Naik, former Petroleum Minister  
in a Press Conference held in Pune on 20th March 2012**

**Pune, March 20:**"A wake up call needs to be heard by the Government of India, the Government of Maharashtra and all those working in the field of leprosy elimination and empowerment of Leprosy Affected Persons (LAPs). New cases of leprosy have been found in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The declaration of the Government of India that leprosy has been eliminated in 2005 has been found wrong", said Shri Ram Naik, former Petroleum Minister in a press conference held in Pune on Tuesday. Dr. S.D. Gokhale, President, International Leprosy Union was also present in the conference.

Giving further details Shri Ram Naik said,"As LAPs were not being medically treated properly and were also in need of empowerment and as the Government of India as well as the Government of Maharashtra were not responsive to the challenges, I had submitted a petition to the Parliament for empowerment of LAPs on 5th December 2007. The Petition was also signed by Dr. S.D. Gokhale of International Leprosy Union, Dr. P.K. Gopal of National Forum of Leprosy, Shri Uday Thakar of Kushta Rog Nivaran Samiti, Shri Baliram Tambade of Maharashtra Kushthapitit Sangathana and Shri Bhimrao Madhale of Sanjaynagar Rahiwasi Sangh. The Petition Committee submitted their report to the Parliament on 24th October 2008 and the subsequent Action Taken Report (ATR) on 22nd November 2010. The original report and the ATR made several recommendations of empowerment of LAPs. Since the recommendations related to various ministries we sought on appointment of Hon'ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh vide our letter on 1st January 2011 followed by three reminders on 28th January, 10th February and 10th March 2011. Since there was no positive response from the Prime Minister we met the highest authority of the nation i.e. Hon'ble President Smt. Pratibha Patil on 14th September 2011.

The Delegation pleaded with the Hon'ble President about the following demands:  
1) Formulation of Comprehensive Socio Economic Rehabilitation Policy for empowerment of LAPs., 2) Amendments to the provisions of 16 Acts mentioned in the original Petition., 3) Enhancement of pension to Rs. 2,000/- per month per LAP and also uniform pension in all states., 4) Provision of social and economical benefits given to persons below poverty line (BPL) and handicapped persons to all LAPs., 5) Provision of civic amenities to Self-settled Colonies of LAPs., 6)Provision of higher educational facilities and scholarships for children of LAPs.,

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7) Removal of VAT imposed on products produced by LAPs., 8) Nomination of LAPs on National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) state and district level committees as well as nomination of LAPs on Rehabilitation Council of India., 9) Conducting a fresh all - India survey to assess the increase and / or elimination of leprosy., 10) Implementation of WHO Guidelines for strengthening participation of LAPs in leprosy services.

"The Hon'ble President assured us to look into the demands positively. However, no decision appears have been taken so far. Meanwhile, Health Minister Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad has stated recently on 13th March 2012 in the Rajya Sabha that out of the total number of LAPs in the world, India's share is alarmingly high of 55%. While there are 1,26,800 LAPs in India, the highest number of LAPs is in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra. The Maharashtra State Leprosy Officer Dr. Pradeep Gaikwad has recently stated that 2,440 new cases have been identified in 19 Districts of Maharashtra. This shocking information should open the eyes of the Government of Maharashtra and also the Government of India. There is therefore, a need to wake up to the situation and take concerted action. While the Government of India and the Government of Maharashtra should implement various suggestions made by the Parliamentary Petition Committee, it is also necessary that various NGOs working on all India basis as well as in Maharashtra for elimination of leprosy and empowerment of LAPs should work together. To that purpose, I appeal Dr. S.D. Gokhale, President, International Leprosy Union and Dr. P.K. Gopal, President, National Forum of Leprosy Affected Persons to take a lead", added Shri Ram Naik.

Shri Naik also announced that," International Leprosy Union has worked out an action plan for themselves to work in five colonies at Dapodi, Pandharpur, Kolhapur, Ahmadnagar and Ulhasnagar. They will develop Bal Vikas Kendras which will look into education, health and nutrition of children, integration of LAPs in the main stream of society, create awareness about human rights and help the groups of women LAPs and also present awards to women leaders from these colonies."

**(Office Secretary)**