

**Leprosy Affected Persons knock the doors of President**

**New Delhi, Sept. 14:** Hon'ble President Smt. Pratibha Patil has assured that she will look into the problems of Leprosy Affected Persons (LAPs) and help them to lead a stigma-free, honourable and purposeful life and also try for total elimination of leprosy from the country. This assurance was given today to a high level delegation led by Shri Ram Naik, former Petroleum Minister. The delegation included Dr. P.K. Gopal, President National Forum of LAPs, Dr. S.D. Gokhale, Chairman, International Leprosy Union, Shri Uday Thakar of Hind Kushtha Nivaran Sangh, Shri Baliram Tambade, President, Maharashtra Kushthapedit Sanghatna, Shri Bhimrao Madhale, President, Sanjay Nagar Rahivasi Sangh, Mumbai and Shri S.K. Dutta, Delhi activist.

Explaining the background of the issue Shri Ram Naik said, "I alongwith prominent persons working in the field of leprosy and also some LAPs staying in self-settled colonies had presented a petition to the Rajya Sabha about the problems and also empowerment of LAPs on 5th December 2007. The Petition Committee chaired by Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu submitted their Report to the House on 24th October 2008 after consideration, discussion, visits to some states and also some self-settled colonies. After receiving the replies from various departments and discussions with concerned ministries, the Action Taken Report (ATR) was tabled by the Petitions Committee in the House on 22nd November 2010. The original Report and the ATR made several recommendations for empowerment of LAPS. We were happy with the recommendations."

"However, as the recommendations related to various ministries, we thought it advisable to meet the Hon'ble Prime Minister for their speedy implementation. Accordingly we

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addressed our first letter on 1st January 2011 seeking his appointment for personal discussion. As there was no response, we repeated our requests by two reminder letters dated 20th January and 10th February and finally the fourth S.O.S. letter on 9th March 2011. We failed to get the appointment from the Prime Minister. We therefore felt distressed at his insensitiveness. Meanwhile the United Nations General Assembly adopted a historical Resolution no. 65/215 dated 25th March 2011 about 'Elimination of discrimination against LAPs and their families' and also issued 'Principles and guidelines' for their implementation. We therefore decided to approach the highest authority of the nation, viz. the Hon'ble President. Accordingly we placed our suggestions and also demands to-day before the Hon'ble President", added Shri Ram Naik.

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., 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.

"We are happy about the discussion and the assurances given by the Hon'ble President. We eagerly look forward for their implementation", said Shri Ram Naik at the end.

**(Office Secretary)**