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ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: *52* Parliament - Parliamentary Committee

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: The Hindu

ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE: 10/3/2024

Panel flags Centre's meagre pensions

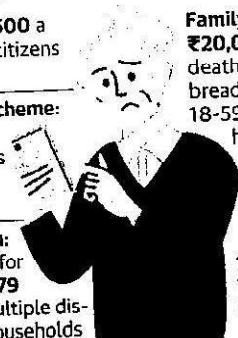
It slams laxity in raising amounts

Little support | The National Social Assistance Programme is applicable to elders, widows and the physically challenged. Here is a low-down:

Pension: ₹200-₹500 a month for senior citizens in BPL households

Widow Pension Scheme: ₹300-₹500 a month for widows aged over 40 in BPL households

Disability pension: ₹300 per month for persons aged 18-79 with severe or multiple disabilities in BPL households



Family benefit: ₹20,000 upon the death of a breadwinner aged 18-59 in BPL households

Annapurna Scheme: 10 kg of food grains per month for senior citizens who are not receiving any pension

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
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The Centre must increase the "meagre" pensions provided for poor senior citizens, widows and disabled people, said the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development in its report submitted to the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

The panel also slammed the government's "laxity in raising the amount", pointing out that recommendations to increase the sums had been made in the last two years as well.

"The relevance of a marquee Scheme like National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) in reaching out to the poor and down-trodden section of society does not go amiss in the eyes of the Committee," said the report.

"However, the Committee is baffled to observe the meagre amount of assis-

tance ranging from ₹200 to ₹500 per month under the different components of this Scheme," it added.

The panel pointed out that it had previously urged the increase of these miniscule pensions in its reports on the Department of Rural Development's (DoRD) demand for grants in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

"However, to the utter dismay of the Committee, nothing much has been forthcoming so far. The Committee does not endorse the non-serious approach of DoRD on this issue. In view of this laxity, the Committee again vehemently recommends the DoRD to look into this issue with utmost sincerity and hasten their processes for bringing an increase in the assistance amount under NSAP," said the report.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

Panel flags Centre's meagre pensions



A wait for pensions in Bhubaneswar. *BISWARANJAN ROUT

The panel also pulled up the DoRD for delays and disparities in the payment of wages and unemployment allowances under the flagship MGNREGA scheme.

"At the time of economic distress caused due to COVID-19 pandemic in particular, there was an increase in the demand of work under MGNREGA. However, inordinate delay in the release of [the 40% component of] funds for skilled/semi-skilled workers under MGNREGA is a huge discouraging aspect and does not go in consonance with the underlying spirit of the scheme," said the report.

The panel noted "the callous approach of the State Governments in the proper

implementation of the provision of unemployment allowance", finding that the provision is not implemented in letter and spirit at the grass root level.

Another issue with MGNREGA is the disparity in wages in different States. "It is still beyond comprehension as to how is it possible that a single scheme having the provision of hundred days of guaranteed work to willing person from the rural settings can have different yardstick when it comes to the payment modalities across the length and breadth of the country," said the report, noting that the Constitution provides for equal pay for equal work.