

'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 rulers, remarked 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 Textile, Satish Chaturvedi was the chief guest.

Lamenting the negligent attitude of the government, she said that the basics of economy are purposefully neglected for the benefit of builders and multinational companies. She said that the bill on unorganised workers with all the suggestions 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 section 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 'Garibon ka stream kitna, hak kina, hisab do, hisab do' from the dais and was immediately supported by the participants of the three-day convention. Patkar said that even the basic human rights for these workers are taken into consideration, there will be no need 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 experience of those working under Employers Guarantee Scheme is not good. Changes in labour legislation is on the cards, but the workers in unorganised sector have lost hopes that it would benefit them, she said.

Patkar said that they are not against industrialization, but it should not kill basic entrepreneurship in the country. The industry should be able to generate employment and the workers should get their rightful dues.

Supporting the private-public partnership, she said that it should not be defined as partnership of government with private business or gov-



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

ernment and peoples' partnership so that the ventures could be oriented towards welfare of all.

Satish Chaturvedi assured the participants that he would talk to the Union Labour Minister Oscar Fernandes on the action plan prepared here and would also raise demand of moving the bill in the Parliament in the budget session. Chaturvedi said that the condi-

tion of Mahadi workers has changed with the formation of Mahadi Workers Act. Security Guards started getting minimum wages after their Board was constituted.

These steps were taken by Maharashtra Government alone and should be implemented throughout the country, he said and added that efforts are being made to protect domestic workers through similar legislation.

Chaturvedi congratulated the organisers for providing a forum for the unorganised workers to raise their issues.

Chaturvedi said that the movement will put pressure on the government. The convention should end here and should be converted into a movement. The efforts should be continuous to pressure the government. He expressed hope if with leaders like Medha Patkar joining the movement, the government will surely be under pressure to do on all the issues relating to unorganised workers.

The convention concluded with a resolution that called for a comprehensive legislation to be introduced in the Parliament ensuring social security and employment security for all workers in unorganised workers and a separate legislation for agriculture workers. An action plan was also prepared with strict mass mobilisation through the country, networking of like minded groups and focused campaign to put pressure on the government. Senior activists Shashi Patel, Ashok Ghosh, Subh Bhatnagar, Subhash Lom Chairman of the Consortium NGOs J Jaji and other members were present on the dais. J Jaji made introductory remarks. Raj Malviya conducted the proceedings.

'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 newsmen she said that 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 policies for the welfare of its own farmers and workers. These unorganised workers are committing suicides and the government is unable to plan policies even to meet their basic needs, she said.

The SEZs were sanctioned without taking people in confidence. The 74th and 75th amendments to the Constitution have been rendered meaningless by the

manner in which these SEZs were sanctioned. The government has not paid any attention towards the economy of the country, work force, labour laws before granting permission to SEZs. The UPA government is playing with the life of crores of workers in the country, she remarked and called it a crime against the nation.

The government has not been able to provide space for the displaced persons so far and is ready to give land for over 150 SEZs. This is a systematic plan to favour multinational companies at the cost of lives of Indian workers, she said.

Patkar said that the SEZs are being sanctioned without paying attention to the issues like generation of employment for the local people, economic growth of local people, welfare of the workers, effect on environment, etc. The government is playing in the hands of builders and multinational companies.

She said that the National Alliance of People's Movement has demanded that representatives of workers, farmers whose land will be acquired, rep-



Medha Patkar

representatives of people and workers should be taken into confidence before planning any SEZ. These special zones should be sanctioned only through democratic processes of approval in Gram Sabha, Mohalla Samiti, etc. Special Export Zones should also be evaluated on issues like employment generation, margin of 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 Haryana will continue.

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

Patkar said that the national movement is being planned for urgent

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