

State finds houses for disabled sex workers

Government's Rehabilitation Proposal Likely To Get Approval At Cabinet Meet Today

Saibal Gupta | TNN

Kolkata: The West Bengal government's proposal to rehabilitate the disabled sex workers and children from the red-light areas is set to get the final nod once it comes up for approval at the cabinet meeting on Monday. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee announced the proposal on the day of 'Raksha Bandhan' but it was delayed since it was becoming difficult for the department to find proper houses for the project.

"We have identified two houses — one at Chetla and another at Tollygunje area — for this project that has been christened 'Muktir Alo'. In the

Chetla building, initially, 100 aged and disabled sex workers will be rehabilitated and the Tollygunje building will house nearly 100 children of the sex workers. Everything has been finalized and we need the nod from the chief minister," said state urban development minister Firhad Hakim.

After the cabinet approves the project on Monday, it will formally take off. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee, while announcing the project, had said that most sex workers take to begging when they grow old and need help from the state at that stage because the society looks down upon them. The children from the red-light ar-



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areas are vulnerable and need care, so that they do not get into the flesh trade. "Initially, some houses were identified, but the locals protested. So, there was an inordinate delay," sources said.

The responsibility of identifying the aged women and children was given to Sashi Panja and Firhad Hakim. "I was looking after the areas in north Kolkata and identified as many as 743 elderly sex

workers, who are so infirm that they cannot even go door-to-door for begging, and 700 children," Panja, who is the parliamentary secretary to women and social welfare department, said. Hakim was responsible for south Kolkata and identified 60 aged sex workers and 112 children. "We have secured the houses and will need an additional Rs 5,00,000 to run the project. The entire cost will be borne by the social welfare department of the state government."

"While the old and disabled will be provided all sorts of facilities including food, clothing, shelter and medicines, the children, apart from the basic

facilities of daily life, will be given education free of cost. They will be sent to school and the government will do everything to monitor their activities. The entire project is aimed at taking these children out of the dungeon," Panja said.

"Sex workers are not aliens. We are happy that the government is playing the role of their guardian. We hope that the houses are in a healthy shape. The state government should rope in organizations that have the expertise to take care of these houses properly," secretary of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Samiti, Bharati Dey, said.