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After NCST rap, Maharashtra district starts connecting Katkari tribe to govt. schemes

The Commission pulls up officials in bonded labour case, district issues compensation, ID cards, signs them up for govt schemes

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After the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) in January cracked the whip on district officials in Maharashtra, for taking lightly the issue of Katkari tribe children being sold into bonded labour, the officials have now submitted an action taken report, complying with all directions.

Rajendra B. Bhosale, District Magistrate (DM) of Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, from where the majority of Katkari children (a PVTG), were purchased for bonded labour, said in his action taken report that his office had already ensured compensation had reached the accounts of all rescued children and their kin.

Further, the DM submitted that he had issued directions to the required officials for the rapid issuance of Caste Certificates, Aadhaar cards, Voter IDs and ration cards for all members of the Katkari tribe in his limits and other PVTGs residing there. For

this, special camps are being held across the district over the next week, where these residents will also be signed up for all government benefits available to them, including housing.

In three cases of bonded labour, where the children were said to have been sold for Rs 5,000 and one sheep each, the rescued children and their family members do not yet have bank accounts and so the district administration has already started the process to open one for them, Mr. Bhosale said.

Further, he said that he is also coordinating with his counterpart in Nashik, to curb the menace of bonded labour, particularly affecting PVTG communities like the Katkari tribe, in this area.

The DM added that ₹20 lakh had been sanctioned to purchase land to build homes for the 25 Katkari families in Ubhadi village, ₹2 lakh had been sanctioned to self-help groups to help these communities with employment and skills training, and the rescued children, with consent of parents, had been enrolled in tribal residential schools close to their families.

The compensation cleared for the rescued children and their kin include under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) (SC/ST) Act and the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, the action-taken report said.

This came after the Commission had issued warrants of arrest for the DMs in Ahmednagar and Nashik, asking them to explain why they were not engaging with the ST Commission as required to do so on this particular issue. Responding to this, the officials appeared before the Commission and submitted sworn affidavits, saying they would immediately work to provide compensation to the families and that would immediately connect them to government schemes and benefits meant for them.

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