

BRING BACK OLD PENSION SCHEME, GOVT. EMPLOYEES WRITE TO CABINET SECRETARY

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In solidarity: Priyanka Gandhi Vadra meeting the protesters who are demanding the implementation of OPS in Himachal Pradesh. PTI-

Demanding that the old pension scheme (OPS) be restored, a federation of Central government employees' unions has written to the Cabinet Secretary, stating that the current National Pension System (NPS) was a disaster for retiring employees in their old age.

The federation, in a letter, said a defence establishment official who recently retired after more than 13 years of service received only 15% of the assured pension he would have otherwise got under the OPS. Under the NPS, the official with a basic pay of Rs. 30,500 received Rs. 2,417 as monthly pension as against the Rs. 15,250 he would have received under the OPS. Another official with a basic pay of Rs. 34,300 received Rs. 2,506 as monthly pension after more than 15 years of service, whereas under the OPS, he would have been entitled to Rs. 17,150 as pension.

The letter signed by the Joint Consultative Machinery (JCM), an apex body of various government unions comprising Group B and Group C officials, read: "It is amply clear that the NPS employees despite their contribution of 10% of their wages every month for their entire service are getting only a very meagre pension and are worse off vis-à-vis the OPS. The pension under NPS remain static and there is no dearness relief to compensate the price rise/inflation as available in the OPS."

It said that all Central government employees, including paramilitary personnel, were opposing the "no guaranteed NPS" and were demanding that the government scrap the NPS.

The Cabinet Secretary is the chair of the JCM. "It is now 18 years after the implementation of NPS. Employees who were recruited on or after 01/01/2004 have now started retiring from service. From the paltry amount they are now getting as pension from NPS it is proved that it is a disaster for the retiring employees in their old age and not a win-win situation," the letter, signed by Shiva Gopal Mishra, Secretary, National Council (Staff Side), JCM, said.

Mr. Mishra told *The Hindu* that the NPS was "an atrocity committed on government employees" and the federation was contemplating serious measures to draw the government's attention. "It is a do-or-die situation. The fight will be taken to the national level. We are in touch with bank and insurance [employees'] associations. We are aware of the country's economic situation and are seeking a practical solution, but how can a retired government employee run their household with a pension of Rs. 1,800?" he asked.

He added that he had had several rounds of meetings with the Cabinet Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training, and Department of Expenditure, and had been told that it was a policy issue beyond the remit of bureaucracy.

The OPS, or the Defined Pension Benefit Scheme, assured life-long income post-retirement, usually equivalent to 50% of the last drawn salary. The government bore the expenditure incurred on the pension. The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government in 2003 decided to discontinue

the OPS and introduced the NPS.

The scheme, applicable to all new recruits joining Central government service (except the Armed Forces) from April 1, 2004, is a participatory, market-linked scheme, where employees contribute to the pension corpus from their salaries, with matching contribution from the government.

Except West Bengal, all States implemented the NPS. The non-BJP-ruled Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Punjab have announced that they would restore the OPS. In the upcoming Himachal Pradesh Assembly election, the OPS has emerged as a key poll issue.

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