

CENTRE BEGINS WORK TO WIDEN PENSION COVER

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In its last order on September 12, the Supreme Court had said: “As far as the National Social Assistance Programme is concerned, even though it is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, the contribution made by the Central government is minuscule.” The Centre’s contribution to the monthly pension is Rs. 200, an amount that has remained unchanged for the last 11 years.

“We would like the Union of India to obtain all necessary information from each of the States and not take unnecessary time to obtain information. The Union of India should also ascertain the amount of pension and the coverage,” the court added, giving the respondents — Centre and States — a period of three weeks to file a “proper and effective affidavit” on the issue.

In his budget speech in February 2018, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had said the government “is implementing a comprehensive social security and protection programme to reach every household of old, widows, orphaned children, *divyaang* (physically challenged) and deprived as per the Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC).”

Currently, Below Poverty Line (BPL) criteria are used to determine the number of people covered under the scheme; if SECC criteria are used instead, coverage will double, said the senior official. Mr. Jaitley, however, said the allocation for the scheme would be unchanged at Rs. 9,975 crore.

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