

Police swoops on disabled

40 DETAINED FOR 'DEMANDING RIGHTS'

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Srinagar, Dec 3: On the World Disability Day Friday, police detained at least 40 physically challenged persons near Rajbagh here after they took out a protest rally “to demand their rights.” Witnesses said the 40 members belonged to the Jammu and Kashmir Handicapped Association (JKHA).

The protesters, they said, were trying to move towards the United Nations office at Sonwar to submit a memorandum seeking interference of the UN General Secretary, Ban Ki Moon, into their grievances. “We were going to the UN office asking it to pressurize the state government to fulfill our demands. But police detained at least 40 protesters in Rajbagh Police Station and thrashed many of them,” said the JKHA president, Sajjad Anwar Masoodi.

He said the state government had failed to alleviate the sufferings of the disabled persons. “That is why we observed the day as the black day to remind the government that it must fulfill our demands and allow us to live a dignified life like others. The government is making many assurances verbally, but doing nothing on ground to address our issues,” Masoodi told Greater Kashmir. The protesters shouted anti-government slogans, urging the Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah to interfere.

While the detained were released in the evening, there was nobody to hear them. “We are not visible anywhere. We have been neglected,” said Javed Ahmad Tak, Honorary Chairman of Humanity Welfare Organization, a non-governmental organization. “We want to live a dignified life. But unfortunately, the state government is not doing anything to make it happen. We are just seeking basic rights which includes right to education and employment.”

Tak accused the state government of talking much and doing little. “We crave for accessibility in government offices including banks and civil secretariat. There are no ramps and lifts for the physically challenged persons. Even the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Persons with Disabilities Act of 1998 have not been implemented,” he said.

The Act guarantees equal opportunities, protection of rights of the persons with disabilities. “Accessibility and Health and Hygiene are main initiatives to protect Rights of persons with disabilities but in the state all these factors are lacking. So how can one expect the inclusion of persons with disabilities to the mainstream society?” Tak questioned.

He said the state government must come up with a “comprehensive policy” with regard to differently-abled persons. “The only thing that the state government has done so far is that the pension of

disabled persons has been increased from Rs 200 to Rs 400. But that is not enough. There are issues related to health, education and employment facing us. They need to be addressed so that we don't feel neglected in the society," he said.

According to the Census 2001 there are 302,670 persons with disabilities in Jammu and Kashmir. "At least 2 lakh persons with disabilities need education and employment for their dignified life. But today we all are shocked to know that less than 2 percent persons with disabilities are educated and less than 1 percent are having employment," Tak said. "There is no evidence of school for blind, speech disabled and hearing disabled people in the state. Employment is the best tool in the hands of persons with disabilities to live a dignified independent life. But there are less identified jobs for the persons with disabilities," he said.