

Business Standard

Disabled? Prove it

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HEAR TO THE GROUND

Even as the government tries to reduce the number of documents one needs to furnish to get official work done, it has failed miserably to issue a single composite certificate to the disabled

# Disabled? Prove it

SREELATHA MENON

A person with disabilities is entitled to a few rights in terms of education, jobs, tax concessions, land allotment, housing, preferred parking and so on. But getting these entitlements is not easy. Often it becomes impossible, especially for the poor.

A person has to first prove that he is disabled. And it is not enough that he proves it once. Each time he has to claim any benefit assured by law he has to prove his disability.

A single disability certificate does not satisfy different institutions. They all demand a different one.

The railways need a certificate issued by their medical board, while universities demand a different certificate.

And how long it takes to get a certificate? How does a parent who is already crushed under the emotional and material agony of coping with a disability in his/her child

find out where and how the certificate can be obtained?

The procedure of assessment of disability by a medical expert requires five to six visits over a period of three to five months. And certificates take even longer to come.

Often the hospital authorised to give a certificate for a particular disability will not address another disability. And people in the country are clueless as to which hospitals provide the certificate for various disabilities. So a man from the village would have to make several trips to the city, and often to the state capital, to first locate the right hospital and then several more trips with the disabled person to get the assessment done.

And after all this trouble, the person finds that the certificate has no validity wherever he goes.

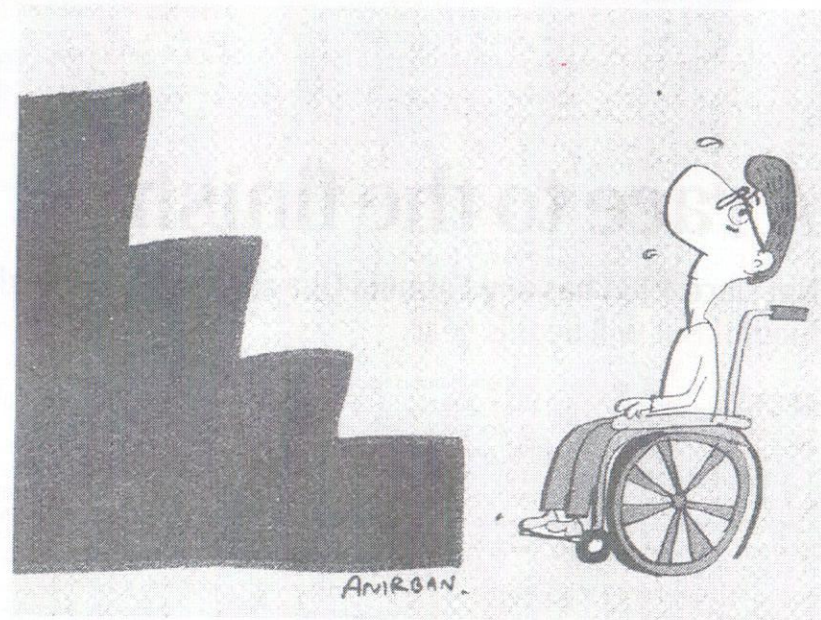
NGOs across the country, like Astha, Arth, Aadi and Swayam, have been holding talks with the Union Min-

istry for Social Justice and Empowerment to change the shape of things. The ministry has responded positively and is working on a uniform set of norms for the whole country. However, the government is still far away from the need to mandate a single certificate that satisfies all.

Swayam, the charity arm of Jindal Group, has recommended a smart card for the disabled. Smeenu Jindal, MD of Jindal Saw who heads Swayam, says, "The immediate need is to have a single and uniform procedure for the whole country. A smart card can be a single stroke, single window solution."

The findings of a survey conducted recently by Astha and Arth in Delhi's seven hospitals authorised to issue disability certificates, underlines the need for such a smart card and an end to penalising the disabled in the name of issuing disability certificates.

"You need five to seven trips,



six photos, and ration card to get a disability certificate. The trips have to be repeated if a hospital refers you to another place. The process then starts all over again," says the survey.

For the railway concession certificate, you need to make

three to five trips, submit two photos and two documents. For an identity card for tax concessions, make three more trips, give three more photos and five pages of Xeroxed documentation.

For pension, make four more trips, gives two more photos

and three documents.

The question is that if a single election card, a single PAN card and a single driving licence satisfies all concerned in this country, why is the disabled person forced to prove again and again that he is disabled?