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NHRC helps rescue bonded labourers

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has come to the rescue of about 20 bonded labourers at Gurgaon in Haryana.

The Commission received a complaint from Prof. Sheotaj Singh, general secretary of Bonded Labour Liberation Front, alleging that about 20 persons, including women and children, were kept as bonded labourers in a stone quarry in Gurgaon.

Taking cognisance of the complaint, the Commission directed the Chief Secretary of Haryana to look into the matter. The State Labour Commissioner, who was asked to visit the place, submitted a report stating that it was not a case of bonded labourers but a dispute of workers regarding wages.

Not satisfied, the Commission deputed its own investigation team, which found that the labourers who belonged to Durgapura village near Jaipur in Rajasthan, belong to nomadic tribes and were dumped five years ago in the quarry. After a year, their wages were stopped and when they demanded full wages, they were confined to their huts after working hours and guarded by armed musclemen. They managed to establish contact with Prof. Sheotaj Singh in August 1999 and next month they were shifted to a place near the outskirts of Jaipur city.

At the instance of the Commission, release certificates were issued to the labourers in December 1999. With the help of the District Magistrate and the Government, arrangements were made to rehabilitate them in Jaipur. They would be permanently settled under Indira Awas Yojna scheme and allotted cultivable land and employment given under the DRD scheme.

Each of the labourers were given Rs. 10,000, of which Rs. 2,000 in cash and the balance deposited in their bank accounts. The Commission lauded the role of officers involved in releasing the bonded labourers and rehabilitating them.

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