

In Bihar eunuchs to be drivers, guards

They come gaudily dressed and dance at weddings and other auspicious occasions. Next time, don't be surprised if you see the eunuchs also educate people about women and child healthcare.

The Bihar government is trying out innovative ways to involve the eunuchs, also called kinnars or hijras, in socially useful work.

It has successfully used the services of eunuchs to recover taxes from habitual defaulters in Patna.

Now, the social welfare department plans to rehabilitate them - in a first such rehabilitation scheme for eunuchs.

Bihar Social Welfare Minister Damodar Raut told IANS that the government would soon launch a plan for the rehabilitation of eunuchs. 'It is in the pipeline. The rehabilitation scheme for eunuchs will be a reality in the state soon,' he said.

'Eunuchs will be provided literacy and vocational training to prepare them for respectable regular employment. It will give them the opportunity to enhance their socio-economic status,' said Masood Hassan, director of the social welfare department.

The eunuchs will be trained free of cost, he said.

Sources in the department said the selected eunuchs would be trained as drivers, cooks and guards for residential apartments, while some others would be provided training in handicrafts, painting or computer applications.

Hassan said the social welfare department had already invited applications from recognised NGOs to conduct a survey of eunuchs to collect information about them before implementing the rehabilitation scheme.

The department also plans to engage some eunuchs to popularise the state government's women and child welfare schemes, an official said.

Eunuchs visit families on auspicious occasions across the state. 'Their visits would be more fruitful if they can be engaged to propagate government schemes,' the official said.

Last year, eunuchs in the state had formed welfare associations demanding the right to employment, marriage and child adoption among other things.

Referring to the position of eunuchs in the Mughal empire, Kali Hijra, a leader of the eunuchs, said they would be employed to guard the harems and some even became the aides of queens.

'We have suffered a lot for centuries and most of us live in abject poverty. We want restoration of our recognition on the pattern of the Mughal era,' Kali Hijra said.

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