

Regarding problems faced by ASHA workers in Kerala

SHRI RAJMOHAN UNNITHAN (KASARAGOD): Sir, I would like to raise a very serious issue before the House. ASHA workers are the backbone of grassroots healthcare and urgently deserve attention. Their ongoing protest in Thiruvananthapuram highlights several unmet demands, including an increased honorarium, timely payments, Rs. 5 lakh retirement benefits and a pension. Despite their crucial role in maintaining Kerala's Health Index and managing the pandemic, the Central Government and the State Government have been evasive, engaging in a counterproductive blame game.

Currently, ASHA workers are getting just Rs. 232 rupees per day as honorarium. They are demanding to increase the amount to Rs. 700 per day. They have carried out a peaceful protest in front of the Secretariat for the last 30 days. The day-night strike is to go to any extent to achieve their rights. As part of that, the Kerala Secretariat will be cordoned off on the 17th of the March, 2025.

While the State Governments must advocate for workers' rights, the Central Government has the fiscal authority to enhance allocations for ASHA schemes. Unfortunately, dismissive remarks from State officials and intimidation tactics have only worsened the crisis.

The Central Government must take the lead by revising honorarium structures, ensuring timely payments through direct transfers, and establishing pension schemes. Collaboration with Kerala is essential to address operational challenges, including the need for humane working hours. Ignoring the plight of ASHA workers undermines India's health governance and betrays those who risked their lives during the pandemic.

I urge upon the Central Government to initiate dialogue, prioritize the welfare of ASHA workers in policy agendas and allocate funds transparently. Achieving sustainable solutions require cooperative federalism rather than bureaucratic inertia. It is high time to honour their service with dignity. Action is needed.