NAC panel to study report on universal health coverage

Aarti Dhar

The group will look into Planning Commission’s proposal to expand NRHM to include urban areas

The National Advisory Council has set up a two-member working group to study the report on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) prepared by the High Level Expert Group and the government’s proposal to expand the scope of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and convert it into a National Health Mission.

The two-member group, comprising Mirai Chatterjee and A.K. Shiva Kumar, will work closely with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Planning Commission to resolve any possible issues arising between the two over the implementation of the UHC report and the National Health Mission. They will come out with some recommendations within four weeks which will be discussed at the next NAC meeting on September 28.

Chaired by United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi, the NAC is tasked with providing inputs in the formulation of policy by the government and to provide support to the government in its legislative business.

The Planning Commission wants the scope of the existing NRHM to be expanded to towns and cities and that it be renamed as the National Health Mission, whereas the Health Ministry has been pitching for a separate National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) for the urban poor. The two could be subsequently merged into a National Health Mission, the Ministry has maintained.

Union Health and Family Welfare Secretary P.K. Pradhan made a presentation on the UHC and the two health missions. Ms. Sindhushree Khullar from the Planning Commission also expressed the panel’s point of view, particularly the absorption capacity of the States and the shortage of funds.

The Ministry has said that the health needs of the people living within a State in places such as mega cities, metropolitan cities or municipal towns differ from those of the rural people. “Hence, there cannot be a uniform approach for both rural and urban areas,” the Health Ministry said in a formal communication to the Planning Commission.
Commission.

The Approach Paper to the 12th Plan has clearly indicated that the government should aim at raising total health expenditure to 2.5 per cent of the gross domestic product by the end of the Plan. However, the draft chapter on health indicates a total public investment on health in the 12th Plan of just 1.58 per cent of GDP as against the suggested 2.5 per cent.

Aruna Roy ‘alarmed’

Meanwhile, in a letter to Ms. Gandhi, activist Aruna Roy — convener and member of the Working Group on Transparency, Accountability and Governance — has said that she was disturbed and alarmed at the violence unleashed on anyone who asked to see records or raised the issue of corruption in governance.

Citing an example, Ms. Roy spoke of a series of attacks on those who sought to question the system. “It speaks of connivance of the local administration with the perpetrators of premeditated violence. One of these manifestations is the misuse of the law and the registration of false cases, and harassment of innocent people,” she said in her letter.

The government, she said, tended to take such events as routine instead of seeing in them a warning of both the increasing discredit of institutions of governance and the callous way in which self-respecting citizens who raised issues are treated, she said in her letter, while seeking a mechanism in each Ministry to deal with complaints of attacks against people who make complaints of corruption.

Underscoring the need for the Lokpal Bill, the Grievance Redressal Bill and the Whistleblowers Bill to be passed in the current session of Parliament, Ms. Roy said the delay in the passage bodes ill for conscientious citizens who exercise their obligations to work against mismanagement and corruption in governance at the point of delivery, which is the cutting edge of implementation of all, and particularly, social sector legislations.

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